

**THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE PREPARATION AND
DELIVERY OF SERMONS: AS EVIDENCED BY FOUR REPRESENTATIVE
SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN EXEMPLARS**

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis-project to the triune Lord of glory and render my highest thanks and worship unto Him. I pray that He, by His grace, may take pleasure both in the work itself and in its beneficial use in the lives of many.

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ABSTRACT

In past generations preachers felt that, in order to deliver true preaching to waiting hearers, they must have the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the preparation and delivery of their sermons. We now have a generation that does not share that assumption. The result is lamentable: the preaching enterprise, largely emptied of God's powerful presence for both preacher and hearers, cannot bear consistently the good fruit that preaching in earlier generations bore.

We need a recovery of the Holy Spirit in the preparation and delivery of sermons. This thesis-project offers a model for recovery by recalling the specific ways in which the Holy Spirit manifested His power in the preaching of four nineteenth-century Southern Presbyterian preachers: James Henley Thornwell, Robert Lewis Dabney, John Lafayette Girardeau, and Benjamin Morgan Palmer. Upon examination, these exemplars display a wholesome welcome of the Holy Spirit into their lives both as Christian men and into their work as preachers of the Gospel. They also display that divine ends cannot be accomplished without divine involvement, to wit, the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in their preparation and delivery of sermons. By their example, grounded in a robust theology of the Holy Spirit in preaching, these exemplars call preachers today to welcome the Holy Spirit afresh to their studies and pulpits and to display and bear the fruits of His powerful presence.

CHAPTER ONE: THE CONTEMPORARY NEGLECT OF THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE PREPARATION AND DELIVERY OF SERMONS

Certain questions surface perennially in the preparation and delivery of sermons; among those questions are these: “How do I craft a sermon?” “How do I deliver that sermon?” and “How do I ensure that the sermon will have maximum effect?” In every generation devout people have wrestled with these and similar questions. Hence, now we enjoy a staggering volume of homiletical literature.

Many in the English-speaking Church since the Protestant Reformation have noted that effective Christian life and ministry cannot occur without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in *Preachers and Preaching*, cites several exemplary men from preceding centuries who preached with special unction from the Holy Spirit.¹ These exemplars include Hugh Latimer, John Bradford, George Whitefield, and John Wesley in England; Robert Bruce and John Livingstone in Scotland; Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, David Brainerd, and Gilbert Tennent in America; and Howel Harris and Daniel Rowlands in Lloyd-Jones’s native Wales. To this list we add another that Lloyd-Jones omits, C. H. Spurgeon.² Other exemplars can be adduced, but these suffice. Doubtless men who proclaimed God’s Word in English in earlier centuries considered the Holy Spirit’s empowerment indispensable.³

We now have a situation, however, where the empowerment of the Spirit has been minimized in favor of homiletical technique. The benchmark of a successful preaching

¹ The information in this paragraph rises from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers and Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 315-325.

² See, e.g., C. H. Spurgeon, “The Holy Spirit in Connection with Our Ministry” in *Lectures to My Students* (reprint edition, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1972), 185-204.

³ For fuller treatment of the Spirit’s necessity in sermon preparation and delivery, see chapter two, below.

ministry, then, no longer is the evidence of the Spirit's presence and power, but rather is the evident skillful use of homiletical technique. This results in an under-emphasis of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the activities related to the preaching event—and this results in preaching weakened at best and disowned by God at worst. The reasons for such a shift lie outside the purview of this thesis-project, but a demonstration that technique trumps the work of the Spirit in preaching shall serve a key purpose—namely, a call for those who proclaim God's Word to embrace the ministry of the Spirit afresh in the preparation and delivery of sermons.

The demonstration of technique's reign in preaching—or at least the relative absence of emphasis on the Holy Spirit in preaching—proceeds to a survey of recently published full-length texts in homiletics. To gain a representative sample, eighty-four texts were surveyed. Thirty-one of those texts rose from assigned and selected reading at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, in the Doctor of Ministry degree track entitled "Preaching: From the Study to the Pulpit." The other fifty-three texts, all paperbacks, rose from the collection at Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas, held under Dewey Decimal System classification number 251.

The eighty-four texts were divided into two groups: texts from publishers and authors within the Protestant mainline tradition and texts from publishers and authors within the Protestant evangelical tradition. Furthermore, the works from within the Reformed theological tradition were culled from each previous set to form a subset within it. Then content analysis on the texts within each of the four categories (mainline, mainline Reformed, evangelical, and evangelical Reformed) occurred, with the texts in each category assigned to one of three groups—named "No mention," "Slight or

contained mention,” and “Copious or systemic mention”—based on the degree of citation of the Holy Spirit in the preaching process. The following table demonstrates the result of the survey.

Table One: Results of survey of full-length homiletics texts:

| | |
|---|---|
| Total texts surveyed: | 84 (100%) |
| Mainline: | 39 (11 from Reformed perspective, 28 otherwise) (46%) |
| Evangelical: | 45 (7 Reformed, 38 otherwise) (54%) |
| Of mainline texts: | 39 (100%) |
| No mention of the Holy Spirit in preaching: | 22 (56%) |
| Slight or contained mention: | 16 (41%) |
| Copious or systemic mention: | 1 (3%) |
| Of mainline texts not from Reformed perspective: | 28 (100%) |
| No mention of the Holy Spirit in preaching: | 16 (57%) |
| Slight or contained mention: | 11 (39%) |
| Copious or systemic mention: | 1 (4%) |
| Of mainline texts from Reformed perspective: | 11 (100%) |
| No mention of the Holy Spirit in preaching: | 6 (55%) |
| Slight or contained mention: | 5 (45%) |
| Copious or systemic mention: | 0 (0%) |
| Of evangelical texts: | 45 (100%) |
| No mention of the Holy Spirit in preaching: | 17 (38%) |
| Slight or contained mention: | 10 (22%) |
| Copious or systemic mention: | 18 (40%) |
| Of evangelical texts not from Reformed perspective: | 38 (100%) |
| No mention of the Holy Spirit in preaching: | 17 (45%) |
| Slight or contained mention: | 9 (24%) |
| Copious or systemic mention: | 12 (32%) |
| Of evangelical texts from Reformed perspective: | 7 (100%) |
| No mention of the Holy Spirit in preaching: | 0 (0%) |
| Slight or contained mention: | 1 (14%) |
| Copious or systemic mention: | 6 (86%) |

The results show that mainline publishers and authors give scant attention to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the preparation and delivery of sermons. Only one work in thirty-nine surveyed gave significant mention to the Holy Spirit's ministry in the preaching enterprise. Most gave no mention whatsoever of the Spirit's role in the process. The evangelical presses fared considerably better, with two works in five giving significant space to explain the Holy Spirit's role in preaching and another one in five giving limited space and mention. The credit for some of that better faring comes from the evangelical works from Reformed authors and presses. A commanding percentage of these works gives significant attention to the Holy Spirit's ministry. Admittedly, the sample size is small, but the result gives some indication of where to look for a renewal of interest in this topic.

If the presses that produce homiletics texts by and large do not produce works about the Spirit's involvement in the preparation and delivery of sermon, then what do those works address? A survey of several printing presses, both mainline and evangelical, reveals the homiletical interest of the day. Fortress Press (Lutheran, ELCA) lists seven homiletics texts currently offered through its auspices.⁴ Of these seven texts two deal with milieu,⁵ one collects sermons under three inter-related topics,⁶ one

⁴ Augsburg/Fortress, <http://www.augsburgfortress.com>, accessed July 2006.

⁵ James H. Harris's *The Word Made Plain* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2004) concerns itself with black preaching. James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers, in their book *Preaching to Every Pew* (Fortress, 2001) offers assistance for preachers who face cross-cultural situations.

⁶ Walter Brueggemann (ed. Charles L. Campbell), *The Threat of Life: Sermons on Pain, Power and Weakness* (Fortress, 1996).

addresses the rhetorical aspect of preaching,⁷ and three show how to construct a sermon.⁸ None of these texts treats the intersection of the exegetical-homiletical enterprise and the Holy Spirit's ministry to any great length.

Presbyterian Publishing Corporation⁹ (Presbyterian, U. S. A.) maintains sixteen homiletics texts in print. Of those sixteen books, three are sermon collections,¹⁰ two display groups of preachers as master craftsmen of sermons,¹¹ three address hermeneutics,¹² four speak to the connection between preaching and theological concerns,¹³ and one book each addresses church-preacher relationships, right-brained preaching, rhetorical strategy, and the preaching of John Calvin.¹⁴ Again, despite useful

⁷ Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Fortress, 1989), a compilation of the 1989 Beecher Lectures at Yale.

⁸ For nuts-and-bolts note H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Fortress, 1958); John S. McClure, ed., *Best Advice for Preaching* (Fortress, 1998); John Killinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching* (Fortress, 1983, 1996).

⁹ Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (<http://www.ppcbooks.com>., accessed July 2006) continues to publish the works previously published by the once separate and later united Westminster Press and John Knox Press.

¹⁰ Patricia G. Brown, *Preaching from the Pew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); William H. Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Preaching to Strangers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992); Thomas G. Long, *Preaching In and Out of Season* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990).

¹¹ See Cleophus J. LaRue, *Power in the Pulpit* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), in which twelve black preachers share their methods of sermon preparation, and Mark B. Elliott, *Creative Styles of Preaching* (Westminster John Knox, 2000), which hails nine well-known preachers as preaching exemplars.

¹² See LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999); Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989); Stephen Farris, *Preaching that Matters* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998). Farris's book attempts to bridge the gap between the setting of Scripture and today's setting.

¹³ See Mike Graves, *What's the Matter with Preaching Today?* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004); Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching Is Believing* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002); Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley, *Preaching as Theological Task* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996); David Buttrick, *Preaching the New and the Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998).

¹⁴ An anecdotal look at church-preacher relationships occurs in Long, *The Senses of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1988). Charles Denison treats right-brained preaching in his *The Artist's Way of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006). John McClure offers rhetorical strategies in his *The*

information in many of the texts, not one text addresses the intersection of the Spirit's ministry and the preaching enterprise.

The books on preaching in print from Abingdon Press (United Methodist) range across a similar range of topics.¹⁵ Four of them treat preaching at the intersection of culture and sub-culture.¹⁶ Seminary homiletics texts of the how-to variety form a major block of Abingdon's offerings in preaching.¹⁷ Other works, as may be expected from a press in the Wesleyan tradition, deal with the affective dimensions of preaching.¹⁸ One work from this press, *The Holy Spirit and Preaching* by James Forbes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989),¹⁹ treats the Spirit's ministry in preaching to appreciable extent. Forbes's work, however, stands alone from four mainline presses and thirty-nine texts surveyed.

Preaching conferences often concern themselves with the techniques that enhance reception of the message to the exclusion of the Spirit's work in the process. One such

Four Codes of Preaching (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004). The subject of T. H. L. Parker's *Calvin's Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992) is self-evident.

¹⁵ Abingdonpress.com, <http://www.abingdonpress.com>, accessed July 2006.

¹⁶ On preaching in postmodern culture see Thomas H. Troeger, *Ten Strategies for Preaching in a Multimedia Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996); Ronald J. Allen, *Theology for Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997). Cf. also Martha Simmons, *Preaching on the Brink: The Future of Homiletics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996). On the relationship between jazz and preaching in the Black tradition see Kirk Byron Jones, *The Jazz of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004).

¹⁷ See here William D. Thompson, *Preaching Biblically: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981); Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985); Richard Eslinger, *The Web of Preaching: New Options in Homiletic Method* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002); Ilion Jones, *Principles and Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956, 2001); Donald English, *An Evangelical Theology of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002).

¹⁸ Here see James E. Massey, *The Burdensome Joy of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998); Thomas R. Swears, *Preaching to Head and Heart* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000); J. Ellsworth Kalas, *Preaching from the Soul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003).

¹⁹ This work is the compilation of Forbes's 1985-86 Beeches Lectures at Yale.

mainline conference, the Beecher Lectures in Preaching at Yale Divinity School, has addressed the intersection between the Holy Spirit and preaching only once in the past sixty years.²⁰ The emphases of mainline presses and mainline preaching conferences leads necessarily to a deleterious result.

This under-emphasis of the Holy Spirit's ministry during the preparation and delivery of sermons necessarily affects the teaching of preaching in mainline seminaries at both the master's and doctoral levels.²¹ Mainline theological education treats preaching almost exclusively as homiletical technique and social milieu. Gateway courses in preaching and accompanying practica abound—as they should—but afterward the coursework tends to more refined technique and to closer scrutiny of ministry settings. No course at ten mainline seminaries surveyed offered to help the student embrace the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the preparation and delivery of sermons.

The situation differs little within the evangelical community of Christ's Church. Like its mainline counterpart, the evangelical camp concerns itself with the techniques germane to preaching and the milieus in which preaching occurs—all while somewhat under-emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching. A survey of the presses that publish evangelical preaching supports this claim.

²⁰ "Bibliography of The Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching," available at <http://library.yale.edu/div/beecher.htm>, accessed July 2006. The one set of lectures that treated the Holy Spirit's role in the preaching enterprise is the set offered by James Forbes (cf. note 20, above).

²¹ Preaching courses and curricula surveyed include those at Columbia Theological Seminary (<http://www.ctsnet.edu>, accessed July 2006) and Princeton Theological Seminary (<http://www.ptsem.edu>, accessed July 2006), SMU-Perkins School of Theology (<http://www.smu.edu/Theology>, accessed July 2006), Candler School of Theology, Emory University (<http://www.candler.emory.edu>, accessed July 2006), Episcopal Divinity School (<http://www.eds.edu>, accessed July 2006), The School of Theology at the University of the South (<http://www.theology.sewanee.edu>, accessed July 2006), Lutheran Southern Theological Seminary (<http://www.ltss.edu>, accessed July 2006) and Wartburg Theological Seminary (<http://www.wartburgseminary.edu>, accessed July 2006), Harvard Divinity School (<http://www.hds.harvard.edu>, accessed July 2006) and Yale Divinity School (<http://www.yale.edu/divinity>, accessed July 2006).

Baker Books, in its published homiletics titles, produces works chiefly concerned with technique and milieu.²² Preachers can learn from these offerings how to craft a manuscript and how to deliver a sermon to maximum effect.²³ They also can learn how to proclaim God's Word in various contexts, from postmodernism on one hand to a congregation in need of change on another.²⁴ Yet John Piper's *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*²⁵ appears to be the lone title to speak at any length to the intersection of preaching and the Holy Spirit among Baker's homiletical corpus.

The William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, of Grand Rapids, Michigan, prints twenty-four homiletics texts.²⁶ A survey of some representative works will continue to establish the need to address the Holy Spirit's role in sermon preparation and delivery. In addition to the usual offerings on techniques²⁷ and settings,²⁸ this press

²² Baker Books, A Division of Baker Publishing Group, <http://www.bakerbooks.com>., accessed July 2006.

²³ An exemplary approach to sermon construction occurs in Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989). Principles of sermon construction from Robinson and from Bryan Chapell occur in John Koessler and Steven Albrecht, *How to Preach a Sermon: An Electronic Guide from Formation to Delivery* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006). Other examples of how to construct and deliver a sermon include Charles W. Koller, *How to Preach without Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), a compilation of two earlier works, *Expository Preaching without Notes* and *Sermons Preached without Notes*, and Haddon Robinson and Torrey Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It: Preaching First-Person Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

²⁴ On postmodernism from Baker see Graham Johnston's *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) and Scott Gibson's edition entitled *Preaching to a Shifting Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004). On preaching for congregational change see Michael J. Quicke, *360-Degree Leadership: Preaching to Transform Congregations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

²⁵ John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Baker, 1990).

²⁶ Eerdmans Publishing Company, <http://www.eerdmans.com>., accessed July 2006.

²⁷ Technical helps include G. Robert Jacks, *Getting the Word Across* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), which treats speech communication techniques, and two works of Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) and *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), which advocate a hermeneutical technique.

²⁸ Works that treat settings include Richard Lischer, *The End of Words: The Language of Reconciliation in a Culture of Violence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) and David J. Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). Also see Michael D. Bush, ed., *This*

offers the preaching community works of a more academic nature—especially the history of preaching.²⁹ One work of this nature, Michael Pasquarello's *Sacred Rhetoric*, insists that preaching is more than the sum of assorted techniques applied to the task,³⁰ but once again an evangelical press concerns itself mainly with the tools and settings of preaching to the neglect of the Holy Spirit in the enterprise.

Kregel Publications offers twenty books on homiletics at its Web page.³¹

Techniques addressed include a book on planning a year's preaching and a book on biographical preaching.³² Books of sermon outlines give the preacher technical aid as well.³³ Milieus addressed include, among others, postmodernism and the small church.³⁴ From this press comes the writing of David L. Larsen, who alludes to the necessity of the Holy Spirit in preaching in his book *Telling the Old, Old Story*.³⁵ Perhaps others make

Incomplete One (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), a collection of sermons offered at the death of a child or youth.

²⁹ Here see, among others, the six-volume work by Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2006), and Richard Lischer, ed., *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching; Augustine to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

³⁰ Michael Pasquarello III, *Sacred Rhetoric* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

³¹ Kregel Christian Books & Resources, <http://www.kregel.gospelcom.net>, accessed July 2006.

³² On planning a year's preaching see Stephen Rummage, *Planning Your Preaching: A Step-by-Step Guide for Developing a One-Year Preaching Calendar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, a div. of Kregel, Inc., 2002). On biographical preaching see R. Larry Overstreet, *Biographical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001).

³³ The three volumes offered by John Ritchie, *500 Sermon Outlines on Bible Truths*, *500 Sermon Outlines on Evangelism*, and *500 Sermon Outlines for Children* (all Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), plus the work by Campbell, Roger, *Preach for a Year, #6* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002) provide copious example.

³⁴ On preaching in the postmodern context see Kenton C. Anderson, *Preaching with Conviction: Connecting with Postmodern Listeners* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001). Concerning preaching in the small church see Glenn Daman, *Leading the Small Church: How to Develop a Transformational Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006).

³⁵ David L. Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story: The Art of Narrative Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995), 136-40.

passing allusions in their works to the Spirit's ministry in preachers and preaching, but there exists no work from this press that treats that ministry systemically.

Two evangelical presses, though offering comparatively few homiletics texts, give disproportionate positive mention of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the preparation and delivery of sermons. At its web site Zondervan Publishing Company offers four homiletics texts: three in English plus a Spanish translation of works by Jay E. Adams.³⁶ Two of Zondervan's published homiletical works concern themselves with the technique of preaching, with one of those works touching upon the intersection of homiletics and New Testament interpretation.³⁷ The other work, Jay Adams's *Preaching with Purpose*, while giving the student of preaching technical instruction, gives both copious acknowledgement of the Holy Spirit's ministry in preaching and overt spur to embrace His ministry in preaching.

Crossway Books likewise publishes few homiletics titles,³⁸ but two compel attention for this thesis. The first, Tony Sargent's *The Sacred Anointing: The Preaching of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, addresses the Holy Spirit's work in preaching by displaying His work in and through a master exemplar.³⁹ The second work, *Preaching for God's Glory* by Alistair Begg and J. M. Boice, rightly identifies the object of true preaching and

³⁶ Zondervan, <http://www.zondervan.com>, accessed July 2006.

³⁷ Here note Terry G. Carter, J. Scott Duvall, and J. Daniel Hays, *Preaching God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Preparing, Developing, and Delivering the Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 2005). For the intersection of preaching and New Testament interpretation see Walter L. Liefeld, *New Testament Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989).

³⁸ Good News & Crossway, <http://www.gnpb.com>, accessed July 2006.

³⁹ Tony Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing: The Preaching of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, a div. of Good News Publishers, 1994).

provides proper assistance for its realization.⁴⁰ Though these two presses apparently emphasize to some extent the ministry of the Spirit in exegesis and homiletics, the fact remains that even the evangelical presses—though somewhat less negligent than their mainline counterparts—under-emphasize the needful presence and work of the Holy Spirit in sermon preparation and delivery.

Evangelical preaching conferences share the same weakness as their mainline counterparts. Two such conferences within the evangelical wing of the Church, The National Conference on Preaching and The International Congress on Preaching,⁴¹ fare like the Beecher Lectures in treating the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the preaching enterprise. Of seventy-eight addresses and workshops offered during four successive National Conferences on Preaching from 2003 to 2006, only one address—Bryan Chapell’s 2004 address entitled “Biblical Exposition: The Spirit’s Power”—touched explicitly the intersection between the Holy Spirit and preaching.⁴² Almost all of the other addresses and workshops offered homiletical technique and tips for preaching within various milieus. Granted, the theme of the 2005 conference, “Preaching with Passion,” may well touch upon the Spirit’s role in preaching, but many of the address titles seem to stress milieus (e.g., postmoderns and the city, et al.) more than the passion requisite for service within those milieus.⁴³ Of fifty-five addresses and workshops offered at the two most recent International Congresses on Preaching (2002 and 2007),

⁴⁰ Alistair Begg, and J. M. Boice, *Preaching for God’s Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999).

⁴¹ Sermon/Ministry Resources: Preaching.com., http://www.preaching.com/preaching/store_cassettes_us., accessed July 2006.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

only one address, David Jackman's 2007 address entitled, "Divine Power to Destroy Strongholds," involved the Holy Spirit's ministry in preaching to any appreciable level.⁴⁴

A survey of the homiletics courses offered at five evangelical seminaries only reproduces the conclusion reached after surveying the evangelical presses.⁴⁵ Training addressed to aspiring preachers neglects the ministry of the Spirit to them and through them. The course titles in each seminary, like those of the presses, address technical and contextual concerns rather than the Spirit's ministry in the enterprise. Doubtless some knowledge, even considerable knowledge, of techniques and situations helps the student of preaching. Neglect of the Spirit's ministry in preaching, however, neglects the heart of the matter.

Hence, the training addressed to pastors and the sermons addressed to ordinary congregations fail to exalt sufficiently the Holy Spirit's work in the study and pulpit. What people in the pews need—and what preachers who speak to them need—is a fresh appreciation of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the activities that inform and constitute preaching. This appreciation, and action consistent with that appreciation, will help rectify the under-emphasis of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the preparation and delivery of sermons.

One of the best ways to do this is by pointing to models and sermon samples that properly emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit. This study answers a fundamental

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Evangelical seminaries surveyed include Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (<http://www.gcts.edu>, accessed July 2006), Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (<http://www.tiu.edu/divinity>, accessed July 2006), Fuller Theological Seminary (<http://www.fuller.edu>, accessed July 2006), Western Seminary (<http://www.westernseminary.edu>, accessed July 2006), and Denver Seminary (<http://www.denverseminary.edu>, accessed July 2006).

question, namely, “What would a robust theology of the Holy Spirit look like in preaching?” A second question closely follows and informs the first question, namely, “What theology grounds such preaching?”

Homileticians and other commentators on preaching from the Reformed theological tradition speak to these questions. Bryan Chapell cites the ministry of the Holy Spirit copiously in his *Christ-Centered Preaching*.⁴⁶ John Piper in *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* warns the reader that God indeed will chasten His preachers should they rely too casually upon professional techniques to the neglect of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷ These writers, among others writing within the Reformed tradition about preaching, owe much of their thought to John Calvin, who could not conceive of effective preaching divorced from the ministry of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

If the Reformed tradition embraces the Holy Spirit’s ministry in preaching, what do their theological emphases look like in actual practice? The examination of four representative exemplars from the Southern Presbyterian tradition will demonstrate a robust theology of the Holy Spirit in the exegetical-homiletical enterprise. This thesis-project necessarily must engage in exegetical and theological research concerning the Holy Spirit and the preaching task. That research will reveal the activity of the Holy Spirit at three different arenas within the exegetical-homiletical enterprise. Then this work will look for the signs of the Holy Spirit’s presence in preaching using historical

⁴⁶ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 24, 57, 61, 63, 94, 222, 244, 251, 257.

⁴⁷ Piper, 38.

⁴⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), IV.i.6.

analysis of the sermons and other writings of four representative Southern Presbyterian exemplars as well as secondary sources of the same.

This research and analysis will serve a twofold purpose. First, it will answer the focal research question, “What does a robust theology of the Holy Spirit in preaching look like?” and its accompanying question, “What theology grounds such preaching?” Second, the research and analysis will lead to a compelling case for embracing the ministry of the Holy Spirit in preparation for sermons and for delivery of the same.

With both the need for this thesis-project established and an intuitive approach for study offered, that project now unfolds more explicitly. Biblical and theological material informing the project falls into chapter two. The investigation undertaken in this chapter will reveal signs of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the aforementioned stages of the exegetical-homiletical enterprise. Chapters three through six explore the sermons of four exemplary preachers from Southern Presbyterianism for signs of the Holy Spirit’s presence in their preaching. Chapter seven summarizes the research findings, urges a fresh embrace of the Holy Spirit in view of the anticipated research findings, and suggests other settings for similar research. With the thesis-project thus broadly sketched, it now considers the Biblical and theological bases for the Holy Spirit in sermon preparation and delivery.

CHAPTER TWO: A THEOLOGY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE PREPARATION AND DELIVERY OF SERMONS

Preaching is communication strategy. This is the almost inescapable conclusion to be drawn from a survey of the homiletical literature and training currently in vogue, such as the survey undertaken within this thesis-project. Contemporary thinking about preaching revolves around two foci, rhetorical devices and current settings, to the virtual exclusion of every other factor. These two foci, the proper use of which may be obtained in almost any respectable college or university, apparently suffices for preaching words drawn from the Bible to waiting hearers.

Yet something is missing—and the more thoughtful and sensitive among us know it. In the above paragraph, not to mention the prevailing ethos in homiletics, there is scant if any mention of the divine in the preparation and delivery of sermons. Perhaps some assume God's operation *via* the Holy Spirit in preparing and delivering sermons without explicitly invoking Him in the enterprise. Based upon the literature and training offered to preachers today, however, this assumption must not be widespread. Homiletical literature, taken as whole both from mainline and evangelical institutions, tacitly conveys the message, "Master the techniques of preaching and the situations into which you preach, and your preaching will be effective." Yet there is something missing here—something without which there will be no effective preaching. What is that something else? That something else is the presence and powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the preparation and delivery of sermons.

Why Must the Holy Spirit Be Present and Active for Effective Preaching?

The first answer to the above question is this: Without the Holy Spirit's involvement in preaching, people cannot hear it. They may apprehend words falling upon their physical ears, but they cannot appropriate those words properly for themselves. The fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in Jesus' day continues until this day: people are ever hearing, but never understanding, and people are ever seeing, but never perceiving (cf. Isa 6:9, Matt 13:15). Paul instructs the Corinthian believers that the message of the cross, those claimed by the cross, and the preaching act itself strike the perishing as foolishness and scandal (cf. 1 Cor 1:18-2:5). They feel this way, Paul asserts, because, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14).¹ This state rises not merely from an ignorance that mere instruction will banish. This state exists because mankind apart from Christ lies dead in sins and trespasses (cf. Eph 2:1)—and, hence, needs a more radical intervention.

God in His mercy intervenes decisively in Jesus Christ. Jesus, perfect in every way, became sin for us as our penal substitute in order that we may become the righteousness of God (cf. 2 Cor 5:21). Therefore, all the condemnation rightly due us falls upon Christ, and none remains for us (cf. Rom 3:25, 8:1). More than this, God raised Jesus from the dead victorious over every foe, even death (cf. 1 Cor 15:26), and Jesus brings His own into that eternal victory (cf. John 14:1-4). Yet this grand act of God

¹ All direct Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, come from *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Colorado Springs, CO: International Bible Society, 1984).

in Christ, and the proclamation of the same, falls as naught unless something else happens.

The Holy Spirit must act to make the spiritually dead live (cf. John 3:5, 6:63). Happily, He does this quite often; theologians call the Spirit's activity along this line *regeneration*.² Many theologians in the Reformed tradition equate regeneration with another term, namely, *effectual calling*. The Westminster Confession of Faith, a classic work of Reformed orthodoxy, describes God's work in effectual calling:

He calls them by His word and Spirit out of their natural state of sin and death into grace and salvation through Jesus Christ. He enlightens their minds spiritually with a saving understanding of the things of God. He takes away their heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh. He renews their wills and by His almighty power leads them to what is good. And so He effectually draws them to Jesus Christ.³

Robert Lewis Dabney, concurring with the Westminster divines, emphasizes that the Holy Spirit acts to regenerate lost people *via* the instrumentality of Scripture, to wit, "His customary instrument (in all cases except the redemption of infants and idiots) is the Word."⁴ The Lord Who calls effectually inclines the ears of those He calls to truly hear. Then He enables them, once hearing, to respond with all their being to the proclamation of Scripture with faith—itsself a gift of God (cf. Eph 2:8-9).⁵ Rightly, then, did Paul note that God was pleased through the folly of preaching to save those who believe (cf. 1 Cor

² See, e.g., John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), II.vii.11, and Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2003), 1.8.2.B.4.

³ *Westminster Confession of Faith: An Authentic Modern Version* (Signal Mountain, TN: Summertown Texts, 1979), x.1.

⁴ R. L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (1878; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 560.

⁵ This path from Scripture proclaimed to true hearing to saving faith rests not merely upon Reformed systematic theology, but fundamentally upon Scripture (cf. Rom 10:17, KJV).

1:21). Yet the Holy Spirit must be present in preaching, because without His presence people cannot hear the proclaimed Word.

The second answer to our earlier question, namely, “Why must the Holy Spirit be present and active for effective preaching?” now rises: Without the Holy Spirit’s involvement in preaching, preachers cannot preach. Lost people, being dead, alienated, and rebellious, cannot be made alive or reconciled to God by techniques—no matter how skillfully ministerial practitioners may utilize them. Therefore, the Holy Spirit must give new life to those who hear the Word preached—for He alone can give such life. The Holy Spirit must also work in and through the ones who proclaim Scripture to waiting hearers. Just as technique cannot make the dead live, so also technique—though it may inform—cannot empower preaching for maximum good effect upon preacher and hearers alike. The Holy Spirit, and the Spirit alone, empowers preaching.

The Holy Spirit works at three different times during the preparation and delivery of sermons. First, the Spirit works behind the scenes before preaching occurs. Second, the Spirit works at the instant preaching occurs. Third, the Spirit works in the inner beings of hearers after the preaching event ends. The Holy Spirit, rather than sprinkling His touch here and there in the preaching task, works mightily from beginning to end of the preaching task to empower the proclamation of Holy Scripture.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit in Sermon Preparation

Well before a given preaching event occurs, the Spirit works to effect His will. First, the Spirit bears witness to the preacher that Scripture is God’s Word committed to writing. He bears witness that Scripture, though written by over three dozen individuals

over a span exceeding a millennium, is neither a document fundamentally of human origin nor a mere period piece from Hebrew or Greco-Roman history. Scripture is God's Word, and a commitment to a lesser view dishonors the Lord—and, thus, necessarily impoverishes those who gather to hear a word from Him.

The claim that Scripture is God's Word has abundant support. The internal witness of Scripture comes first. Scripture testifies to itself as the Word of God.⁶ The vast preponderance of the evidence points to the Lord Himself as the ultimate Author who inspired His appointed human authors. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Thess 2:13). Late in his life and missionary career Paul wrote to Timothy, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Peter wrote to the first-century church that no prophecy originated in the will of man, but men spoke from God as the Holy Spirit led (cf. 2 Pet 1:21). The Psalmist throughout Psalm 119 equates the written law with the Word of God, and therefore he orders his life according to it (Pss 119:9-12, 105, et al.). These human authors of Scripture do not consider Scripture fundamentally a human work, but they testify to its fundamentally divine authorship.

The remarkable literary unity of Scripture provides a second support for the divine authorship of Scripture. The written Word of God has unity because of the living Word, Jesus Christ, its unifying Person. The Old Testament looks forward to Him and

⁶ Also see *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, i.4, which notes God as the ultimate Author of Scripture.

foreshadows His appearing in numerous ways. The New Testament announces His presence, His decisive death and resurrection, and what yet shall come in redemptive history.⁷ Following the Westminster Confession of Faith, I believe that the Bible declares a single covenant after the fall of man, a covenant of grace, given in two administrations: first by adherence to the Law of Moses, and afterward by faith in Jesus Christ.⁸ Promises come to fulfillment in Scripture hundreds of years after their initial utterance. It is too much to ask someone to believe that forty authors—many not aware of the others—wrote a record of such exquisite coherence and compelling accuracy in their natural faculties. Though their several personalities shine from the words they penned, Someone else moved the penmen. The Holy Spirit, without violence to the will and the faculties of each human author, sufficiently moved within the process to gain for Himself the correct honor as Author of Scripture. Thus John Bright affirms this with his rhetorical question, “Is not the true author of Scripture the Holy Spirit?”⁹

Indeed the Holy Spirit wrote a remarkably united Word. He also exhibits within that united Word a remarkable diversity. Though published generally inside a single cover, forty human authors wrote the words of Scripture over a span greater than a millennium. These authors wrote in at least three different languages—Hebrew, Aramaic

⁷ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 237, shows Christ at the center of his redemptive-historical scheme. See also his *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 98, which shows the scheme in further detail—with Christ remaining at the center.

⁸ See *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, vii.1-6.

⁹ John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1967), 83, quoted in Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 116, n. 21. See also Justo Gonzalez’s estimation that Martin Luther believed Scripture ultimately written by the Holy Spirit (*A History of Christian Thought, Revised Edition, Volume 3: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975], 50).

and Greek—and they wrote from several locations in the Middle East and southeastern Europe. They transmitted their messages in various literary forms to people in widely diverse situations. Only God could produce a work so simultaneously united and varied. Simple human authorship, even multiple human authors, must be disregarded in favor of the fact that Scripture ultimately—from cover to cover—is God’s Word and God’s handiwork.

Again, the Holy Spirit must convince of this truth. Paul writes the Corinthian church, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). The Westminster divines affirmed this, as evidenced by this selection from *The Westminster Confession of Faith*:

We may be influenced by the testimony of the Church to value the Bible highly and reverently, and Scripture itself shows in so many ways that it is God’s Word; for example, in its spiritual subject matter, in the effectiveness of its teaching, the majesty of its style, the agreement of all its parts, its unified aim from beginning to end (to give all glory to God), the full revelation it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, its many other incomparably outstanding features, and its complete perfection. However, we are completely persuaded and assured of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Bible only by the inward working of the Holy Spirit, Who testifies by and with the Word in our hearts.¹⁰

Ultimately the Holy Spirit, then, penned the written Word of God *via* the intermediate means of inspiring human authors—and He persuades readers that this fact is true. The Holy Spirit, having persuaded His preachers that Scripture is God’s Word, next extends His ministry to the preacher grappling with a single text for preaching.

Second, the Holy Spirit guides the preacher to His choice for a Scripture text for preaching at a given event. Many aids and techniques abound to help answer this

¹⁰ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, i.5, quoted in Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 24.

question. Some preaching traditions favor the Revised Common Lectionary or other lists of suggested passages for preaching texts. Other traditions prefer a continuous lection; that is, the preacher proclaims a large portion of Scripture (such as a book) literary unit by literary unit week by week. Still other traditions seek more sensitivity to the people in the pew and to the circumstances of our times. Ministry to felt needs and speech to the culture take high priority in such situations. At the very outset of the exegetical-homiletical enterprise the preacher faces a temptation to trust techniques and aids, helpful though they be, to the exclusion of the Helper's help.

Bryan Chapell alerts us to this danger and urge us to heed the Spirit when selecting a text for preaching when he asserts, "No catalyst for selecting a text is more important than sensitivity to the leading of the Spirit."¹¹ Greg Scharf agrees, saying, "We rely simultaneously upon the objective written Word and upon the subjective guidance of the Holy Spirit who guides us in selecting a preaching portion."¹² The Holy Spirit, in preaching most pleasing to God, guides the preacher to the proper text.

Why must the Holy Spirit guide to His appointed text? He must for two reasons: First, the entire preaching enterprise, from start to end, is God's. The ground for preaching, God's self-revelation in Scripture, is His own Word to humanity. The end of preaching, the salvation of God's people, God declares through Paul's instruction to the Corinthians, "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor 1:21). Hence, the means of orally conveying God's Word to hearers who believe, i.e., preaching, fundamentally belongs to God also. If everything

¹¹ Chapell, 61.

¹² Greg R. Scharf, "The Spirituality of Jesus as Seen in John 14:10: An Example for Preachers," *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society*, vol. 4, no. 1 (March 2004): 33.

concerning preaching belongs to God in general, then everything concerning preaching on a particular occasion belongs to Him as well—including His appointment of a Scripture text. Though this be reason enough to seek God for His will regarding the selection of a text, another reason also compels attention.

Preachers have finite knowledge and wisdom concerning the factors that lead to proper discernment of a preaching portion. Though a given preacher's knowledge of certain factors, such as his hearers' environment, their needs, their hurts, their spiritual receptivity, and so forth, be considerable—even prodigious—yet that knowledge remains finite. The same holds true for a preacher's apprehension of God's aims within in a given preaching event. The preacher may sense with a given text and accompanying sermon that God desires to save, or to comfort, or to reprove a congregation. The preacher probably is correct, but perhaps incorrect—and occasionally wildly incorrect. The probability of errors in this area, humanly speaking, rises when the preacher does not have familiarity with the hearers; this is often true for pastors early within a pastorate and when guest preaching. For these reasons, among perhaps others, the Holy Spirit must guide the preacher to His selected text.

With the need for the Holy Spirit to guide preachers in the selection of their texts now established, a new question arises, namely, "How does the Holy Spirit guide to His appointed text?" C. H. Spurgeon remarks, "If any one enquire of me, 'How shall I obtain the most proper text?' I should answer, 'Cry to God for it.'"¹³ Sometimes God's response to this cry appears to involve the most ordinary means. The Spirit may bring to the preacher's mind the spiritual needs of the congregation, the issues in contemporary

¹³ C. H. Spurgeon, "On the Choice of a Text" in *Lectures to My Students* (reprint Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 86.

society that require address, and the necessity to proclaim the whole counsel of God. At other times the Spirit's leadership to a text is quite extraordinary.

Sometimes God just grips a preacher with a text for no apparent logical reason. No outward condition, such as spiritual need or current setting, comes to mind to dovetail with the text. Yet the preacher, unable to shake the Spirit's increasingly clear leadership toward this text, yields to preach the text. Upon the proclamation of this text, the hearers—perhaps only one, but likely several—testified that his pulpit work that day had glorious effect in their lives. One may testify to the sermon's immense comfort to his hurting soul, while another testifies to the conviction of his sin and subsequent repentance that the sermon brought. None of this good effect could the preacher foresee; all the preacher perceived was an unshakable, Spirit-born necessity to preach his given text on a certain date. If the preacher failed to heed the Spirit's leadership—a leadership most difficult at times to codify—then God's people may have left the sanctuary wanting for spiritual fare, and the Holy Spirit, grieved, may have withdrawn His powerful presence for a season.

In sum, then, God often reveals to the preacher His will for a given preaching portion by drawing attention to the means here termed ordinary. Yet to turn to these means without turning to the One who owns, conveys and illumines Scripture both fails to honor the Lord and shortchanges the ones who gather to hear Scripture proclaimed.

Once the Holy Spirit leads the preacher to the preaching portion of His pleasure for an occasion, He next illumines that text—in order that the preacher may see what the text says and how the text applies to the hearers. Those who preach know, and many who hear know, that God's Word through David rings true, "In Thy light we see light"

(Ps 36:9, KJV), and without that light none see. Preachers, and the hearers by extension, need the Spirit's light in both exegesis and application; an examination of the Spirit's ministry in each of these activities now proceeds.

By exegesis the preacher, under the Spirit's guidance and empowerment, draws from the text (rather than reading into the text) its meaning. The preacher now wrestles to note what the text actually says. The foregoing assumes that God Himself, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, moved human beings—over three dozen of them—to write His Word. It also assumes that God did this without overriding the several wills and faculties of the human authors. Hence, the human authors intended to write, and actually wrote, what God intended to be written. David L. Puckett, a student of John Calvin's exegesis, underscores this point, "It is apparent that Calvin is unwilling to divorce the intention of the human writer from the meaning of the Holy Spirit. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that for him, the intention, thoughts, and words of the prophet and of the Holy Spirit in the production of scripture are so closely related there is no practical way to distinguish them."¹⁴ Hence, it makes good sense indeed to approach the ultimate author of Scripture for insight into the meaning of a text.

Exegetes face a dizzying array of material to help unlock the meaning of Scripture. The temptation, once again, lies in the use of the helps without consideration of the Spirit's help. Bernhard W. Anderson notes wryly, "The Bible, as someone has

¹⁴ David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995), 36-37, quoted in Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 140.

said, throws a lot of light on the commentaries!”¹⁵ Exegetes can do studies in the original languages of Scripture, note the literary style of the text, examine the historical and cultural concerns contemporary with the text, and view seemingly *ad infinitum* what others have to say about the text. All of this, and more, can be attempted without direct consultation with the Lord Himself. The result, alas, does not rise to the level possible with the Spirit’s ministry in the study.

The Holy Spirit guides believers into all truth by revealing the things of Christ to them (cf. John 16:13-15). This certainly holds true for those whom the Spirit calls to preach the good news of Christ. The tools commonly associated with exegesis provide invaluable assistance in determining God’s intended meaning, and the preacher does poorly who does not work hard and well with the God-given tools available. Yet, as with the selection of a Scripture text, human ability often fails—and should always fall—before the infinite ability of the Holy Spirit to teach what Scripture says. Too often preachers find themselves moved to seek the Spirit’s assistance, if they seek at all, only when their skills and libraries cannot penetrate to God’s truth in a text.

Charles Spurgeon affirms the Spirit’s ministry in exegesis in his classic lecture, “The Holy Spirit in Connection with Our Ministry”:

It is in our study-work, in that blessed labour when we are alone with the Book before us, that we need the help of the Holy Spirit. He holds the key of the heavenly treasury, and can enrich us beyond conception; He has the clue of the most labyrinthine doctrine, and can lead us in the way of truth. He can break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bar of iron, and give to us the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places.¹⁶

¹⁵ Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament, Fourth Edition*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986), xiv.

¹⁶ Spurgeon, “The Holy Spirit in Connection with Our Ministry” in *Lectures to My Students*, 188.

For Spurgeon, then, no true study of Scripture occurs without the direct enlistment of divine aid. He warns his students against ignoring the Spirit's ministry in the study, saying,

If you study the original, consult the commentaries, and meditate deeply, yet if you neglect to cry mightily unto the Spirit of God your study will not profit you; but even if you are debarred the use of helps (which I trust you will not be), if you wait upon the Holy Ghost in simple dependence upon His teaching, you will lay hold of very much of the divine meaning.¹⁷

Walter Kaiser, closely following Spurgeon, writes, “We must in all good conscience point to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit as the source of any confidence that we might have in our message *even after we have acted most responsibly in the study and preparation of the text for proclamation*” (italics mine).¹⁸ The preacher simply must enlist every resource at his disposal in order to determine the Spirit's meaning in a given text. Failure here is weakness at best and irresponsibility, even indolence, at worst. Yet the most assiduous of studies apart from the Spirit's direct light upon that study will fall short of God's intent for sermon preparation.

The preparation process now moves from exegesis to application, or from the question, “What does the text say?” to the question, “How then shall we live?” As before, so again now the Spirit enables the preacher to understand how the text under study applies to the lives of his hearers. This requires great wisdom. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit supplies it in abundance. Scripture even calls Him the Spirit of wisdom (cf. Eph. 1:17). Inasmuch as Scripture elsewhere derides human wisdom (esp. at 1 Cor 1:18-

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 235.

25), it behooves the preacher to seek the Lord for the divine wisdom requisite for the right application of Scripture.

Bryan Chapell, speaking to application within preaching, first denies man's fundamental ability or responsibility to apply Scripture. That function belongs to the Spirit: "Ultimately, the Spirit alone can apply the truths of his Word."¹⁹ Chapell's next points about application serve both to inform concerning application and to move this discussion toward a final topic before considering the Spirit's work at sermon delivery, namely, that application relies to great extent upon the preacher's walk with God:

Only preachers whose minds and motives are conformed to God's will by the Spirit's daily work will reflect the wisdom and maturity of judgment that grants power over application's breaking point . . . Even when it hurts people listen to application when they perceive spiritual integrity in the preacher. Such trust does not rise from academic exegesis or homiletical structure but results as a pastor's life reflects the indwelling Spirit.²⁰

As he discusses sermon application, Chapell hits upon a truth widely perceived but less often mentioned explicitly: the Holy Spirit must do something within the person of the preacher.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit upon the Preacher

The work of sermon preparation occurs with few, if any, onlookers, but the Holy Spirit must infuse, grip and equip the preacher in a closet more lonely than the study—the closet where the preacher meets alone with God. Calvin Miller writes, "The oral side of our career is visible, but it is never the source of spiritual power. In fact, our devotional

¹⁹ Chapell, 222.

²⁰ Ibid.

life . . . is the secret of real clout.”²¹ David Larsen alludes to a relevant work when he writes, “Dennis Kinlaw’s seminal *Preaching in the Spirit* warmly and wisely speaks of the ‘inner explosion’ of the truth of God in our own hearts as prefatory to preaching.”²² He calls this inner explosion *unction* and quotes E. M. Bounds regarding it, “This unction comes to the preacher not in the study but in the closet. It is heaven’s distillation in answer to prayer. It is the sweetest exhalation of the Holy Spirit.”²³ That great preacher of the American South, James Henley Thornwell, urged his fellow laborers, “to seek the illumination of the Holy Spirit, his unction, his blessing, and—as was so amply illustrated by the examples of the master preacher himself—to seek the fire of the altar to fall on the offering of their preaching.”²⁴

Scripture demonstrates convincingly that the Spirit empowers men who have been with Jesus to proclaim His message. Peter, though comparatively unlettered, stood on that first Christian Pentecost and preached with such power in the Spirit that three thousand came to Christ as a result (Acts 2:14-41). John, though similarly unlettered, apparently had similar endowments, including courage, for when the two stood before the Sanhedrin because of their preaching of Jesus, the Council took note that the men had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). Even Paul, a man of singular advantages and attainments in

²¹ Calvin Miller, *Spirit, Word and Story* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 25-26, quoted in Arturo G. Azurdia III, *Spirit-Empowered Preaching: Involving the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, an imprint of Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 139.

²² David L. Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story: The Art of Narrative Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995), 139. See also Dennis F. Kinlaw, *Preaching in the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, Zondervan, 1985).

²³ E. M. Bounds, quoted in Roy L. Laurin, *Epistle of John* (Wheaton, IL: VanKampen, 1954), 91, and quoted by Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story*, 137-38.

²⁴ James Henley Thornwell, quoted in Douglas Kelly, *Preachers with Power: Four Stalwarts of the South* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 83.

the first-century world, received power from on high to proclaim the Christian message (Acts 9:1-19, et al.). If key New Testament proponents of Jesus needed the Spirit for their work—and were told to tarry from working until it came (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4)—then those called to proclaim the Good News today must tarry for His empowerment and be long with Him in the tarrying.

The work of the Spirit in the days and hours before the sermon's delivery does not stop with the revelation of God's Word to the preacher. It also involves the fresh contact of God Himself *via* the Spirit with the preacher. Precisely then, and only then, may the preacher consider himself ready to enter the pulpit to deliver God's Word to a waiting people.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit in Sermon Delivery

The Holy Spirit executes considerable ministries at the instant Wayne McDill calls “the moment of truth.”²⁵ The ministries of the Spirit come to the preacher during the delivery of God's message chiefly along two lines. First, the Holy Spirit heightens the so-called natural faculties that the preacher brings to the sacred desk. Second, the Spirit gives evidence of supernatural endowment. That is, He enables the preacher far above anything that can be called natural.

The Holy Spirit enhances the ordinary faculties that the preacher brings to the pulpit. Jonathan Edwards, perhaps in Christ the greatest mind and heart ever reared upon American soil, penned these words about the Spirit's work in natural facility: “When a person is in an holy and lively frame in secret prayer, it will wonderfully supply him with

²⁵ Wayne V. McDill, *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999).

matter and expressions . . . [in] preaching.”²⁶ For Edwards, the Spirit’s grip upon the preacher manifests itself, among other ways, in enhancement of recall and of expression during delivery. Robert McKenzie, reflecting upon his hearing of a Spirit-infused preacher, writes as follows:

Although at that time I had no experimental acquaintance with the truth as it is in Jesus, yet his grave appearance in the pulpit, his solemn, weighty and majestic manner of speaking, used to affect me very much. Certainly his preaching was close, and his address to the conscience pungent. Like his Lord and Master, he spoke with authority and hallowed pathos, having tasted of the sweetness and felt the power of what he believed.²⁷

McKenzie saw the evidence of the Spirit’s empowerment of Rev. John Brown in enhancement of natural capacities in his delivery. To be sure, McKenzie refers to traits he perceived in the preacher that come signally from God (authority and hallowed pathos), but he does note those natural gifts heightened in this compelling preacher.

Not only does the Holy Spirit enhance the so-called ordinarily facilities of the preacher at delivery, but He also enables the preacher supernaturally during sermon delivery. At a point in the Exodus narrative Pharaoh’s magicians cannot duplicate God’s work through Moses, and they declare, “This is the finger of God” (Exod 8:16-19, esp. 18-19). The supernatural work of God gets God his glory; after all, this work cannot be created or copied by man. In the experience of God’s supernatural enabling the preacher knows firsthand the powerful presence of God in the sermon delivery.

David Larsen writes almost as a cry, “But for the Christian communicator, there must be this above all: the sovereign ownership of the Holy Spirit on the preacher and the

²⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the Revival* (from C. Goen, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Volume 4* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972], 438), quoted in John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 99.

²⁷ Robert McKenzie, *John Brown of Haddington* (London: Banner of Truth, 1918), 105, quoted in Larsen, 138.

preaching.”²⁸ Of Paul’s preaching, which doubtless showed the ownership stamp of God, Wayne McDill notes, “Paul described his own preaching as going beyond the qualities of human rhetoric men might expect in a preacher.”²⁹ Preaching owned by God embodies the person of the preacher, to be sure, but this preaching shows the power of the Holy Spirit—and chiefly so. James Earl Massey notes of such preaching, “The anointed preaching carries the hearers beyond the limited benefit of the preacher’s personality and rhetorical abilities.”³⁰ Bryan Chapell agrees that the Spirit, to accomplish His will, works beyond the ability of the preacher when he writes, “The glory of preaching is that God accomplishes His will through it, but we are always humbled and occasionally comforted with the knowledge that he works beyond our human limitations.”³¹ Though the Spirit must not be defined in human terms, especially in terms of human ability, it becomes clear that the Spirit’s work easily supersedes the effort the preacher brings to the task.

The preacher must not consider this supernatural operation of the Spirit at sermon delivery optional; His operation must be thought essential. The Apostle Paul, under the Spirit’s inspiration, asks rhetorically of the preaching task, “And who is equal to such a task?” (2 Cor 2:16). He answer his question some verses later; his competence comes from God (2 Cor 3:5). Others affirm what the Holy Spirit affirms through Paul. Arturo Azurdia asserts, “The efficacious empowerment of the Spirit of God is indispensable to

²⁸ Larsen, 139-40.

²⁹ McDill, 11.

³⁰ James Earl Massey, quoted in Forbes, James, *The Holy Spirit and Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 54, further quoted in Larsen, 139.

³¹ Chapell, 24.

the ministry of proclamation.”³² Walter Kaiser writes, “Purity in our use of the source of our message and accuracy in the method of reproducing that message are not enough; the delivery of the message must likewise be attended by the evident presence and powerful working of the Holy Spirit if the Church is ever going to make an impact on an indifferent world.”³³ The Holy Spirit’s supernatural enabling of the preacher, admittedly difficult to pin for study at the instant of sermon delivery, most often reveals itself in the effects upon the hearers during and after the preaching event, and to the Holy Spirit’s work after sermon delivery this discussion now turns.

The Result of the Holy Spirit’s Ministry in Preaching: Changed Lives

The chief evidence of the Spirit’s activity after the sermon is the hearers’ changed lives. No one who met Jesus remained unchanged from the encounter (Zacchaeus, for example, in Luke 19:1-10). As the result of Paul’s preaching, the lives of the Corinthians changed from those mirroring their debauched city into those mirroring the life of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor 6:9-11). The New England Puritans insisted upon the changed life as a chief sign of God’s election of them.³⁴ Ben Haden, longtime senior minister of the First Presbyterian Church of Chattanooga, Tennessee, provided a radio broadcast ministry entitled *Changed Lives*,³⁵ thus underscoring his sense of fundamental evidence of

³² Azurdia, 13.

³³ Kaiser, 236-37.

³⁴ This from class notes from the course at Erskine Theological Seminary, Due West, South Carolina, entitled “The Puritans” and taught by Ray King, fall 1993.

³⁵ The broadcasts occurred, among other stations, over station WMIT-FM in Black Mountain, North Carolina.

Christian election. The Holy Spirit still changes lives—and His use of preaching constitutes a chief means by which He changes lives.

Few in the history of preaching enjoyed such powerful effects after preaching as Peter Marshall (1902-49).³⁶ Testimonies abound concerning the effect of Marshall's preaching upon certain hearers—effects more properly credited to the Holy Spirit. An anonymous student wrote, "I am a freshman in college . . . I was so far away from God, but because of what Peter Marshall has taught me about the joy of the Christian life, I am happy to tell you that this is no longer the case."³⁷ A teenager at the Presbyterian conference grounds at Montreat, North Carolina, wrote after hearing Marshall, "I slipped out the rear door, hurried back to our cottage, and crawled into bed without a word to anyone. I wanted only one thing: to sense to the fullest—right then—the companionship of that Christ who was so real to Peter Marshall."³⁸ A young man during Marshall's pastoral ministry offers, "I received Peter's preaching with all the eagerness of a hungry man for a square meal. His powerful messages burned deep into my soul and became the very foundation for what I believe today."³⁹ An anonymous official in Washington, concerning Marshall, expressed himself, "No other person I have ever known has

³⁶ Peter Marshall, a native of Scotland, came to America in 1927 and received his B. D. at Columbia Theological Seminary in 1931. He was a frequent supply preacher in his student days, and after graduation he served in Covington, Georgia (1931-33), at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Atlanta (1933-37), and at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D. C. (1937-49). Concurrently, during the 80th Congress and the first weeks of the 81st Congress (1947-49), he served as Chaplain to the United States Senate concurrent with his ministry at New York Avenue.

³⁷ This testimony rises from the collection of Peter Marshall's sermons edited by Catherine Marshall entitled *John Doe, Disciple: Sermons for the Young in Spirit* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 13.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 54. Cf. *ibid.*, 53-54, for the full account of the night she heard Peter Marshall at Montreat.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

influenced my life so profoundly as Dr. Marshall. Whatever faith I have found has been lighted from the torch of his magnetic faith.”⁴⁰

Truly preachers do not know the full impact of what they proclaim. Note the Spirit’s special ministry to two girls who heard Peter Marshall preach on death—one of whom would depart this plane within days after hearing the message and the other left to mourn her loss:

Last Sunday a friend and I heard you preach on death! Afterwards she told me and my roommates that you had made death such a beautiful natural experience that for the first time in her life, she was no longer afraid to die. She—Marion—was killed Wednesday in an automobile trip to Florida . . . Because she was so young (twenty-four), so full of life, so happy, it has been a deep shock to all of us who knew her. One of our greatest comforts has been her comments on ‘Rendezvous in Samarra’ which released her from the fear of death.⁴¹

In this account two lives changed: one just before it removed from this world to be with the Lord, and another in first-hand witness from sermon through grief to confidence in God—and all by the Spirit’s activity in Marshall’s preaching.

Preachers, in and of themselves, cannot incline their hearers to embrace the Lord and to continue in Him. Only God can effect this, and He often effects this through Spirit-empowered preaching. Walter Kaiser, as noted earlier, says that the Holy Spirit must operate if preaching shall make an impact on an indifferent world. He writes further to this truth:

Yes, even when we have faithfully discharged our full range of duties as exegetes and when we have also pressed on to apply that exegesis by principizing the text paragraph by paragraph into timeless propositions which call for an immediate response from our listeners, we still need the Holy Spirit to carry that word home to the minds and hearts of our hearers if that word is ever going to change men’s lives.⁴²

⁴⁰ Quoted in Catherine Marshall, *A Man Called Peter: The Story of Peter Marshall* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951), 111.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Durand, to Peter Marshall, quoted in *John Doe, Disciple*, 206.

⁴² Kaiser, 236.

The full range of human fidelity cannot suffice to effect the change that preachers desire to attend their preaching. Only God through His Holy Spirit can do this, and Kaiser rightly notes the fact. Yet preachers may rest confident that God will in fact move through preaching that invites His Spirit to this aim. Arturo Azurdia writes words that echo this truth: “According to his own good pleasure He will be pleased to take our feeble and flawed presentations of the gospel and fill them with His irresistible power, consequently overcoming the hearts of sinful people that, otherwise speaking, will prove to be impenetrable.”⁴³ Bryan Chapell’s words concur: “When we present the light of God’s Word, his Spirit performs God’s purposes of warming, melting, and conforming hearts to his will . . . The Holy Spirit uses our words, but his work, not ours, affects the hidden recesses of the human will.”⁴⁴ A fundamental evidence of the Spirit’s work after preaching, then, is changed hearers—and none but the Holy Spirit can effect such a work.

The Sweeping Ministry of the Holy Spirit in Sermon Preparation and Delivery

From beginning to end, then, the work of preaching fundamentally is the work of the Holy Spirit. Several men, with sweeping statements, sum the whole. In particular they stress the need for the Holy Spirit’s power and presence in the work of sermon preparation and delivery—without Whom no effective preaching can occur.

C. H. Spurgeon made this extended remark to his students over one hundred years ago, but the words remain as relevant now as when first written:

To us, as ministers, the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential. Without him our office is a mere name. We claim no priesthood over and above that which belongs to every child of God; but we are the successors of those who, in olden times, were moved of

⁴³ Azurdia, 27.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

God to declare his word, to testify against transgression, and to plead his cause. Unless we have the spirit of the prophets resting upon us, the mantle which we wear is nothing but a rough garment to deceive. We ought to be driven forth with abhorrence from the society of honest men for daring to speak in the name of the Lord if the Spirit of God rests not upon us.⁴⁵

For Spurgeon, then, the Spirit constitutes no convenient, helpful addendum. The Spirit ranks for Spurgeon as He does for Arturo Azurdia: the *sine qua non* of Gospel preaching.⁴⁶ Spurgeon no doubt carried a low view of fallen human nature, particularly unregenerate human nature, due to his Calvinistic worldview; hence, it follows that Spurgeon holds such a high view of the Spirit's operation in the preaching process.

If Spurgeon shows the indispensability of the Spirit's ministry, then Wayne McDill shows the pervasiveness of His work. McDill, like Spurgeon, asserts that the Holy Spirit is the key element in the communication known as preaching,⁴⁷ but he makes the point at the end of a statement about the all-encompassing ministry of the Spirit in preaching:

The Spirit of God is at work in the life and thinking of the preacher—to direct his thoughts, to inspire his interpretation of Scripture, to give him creative ideas for presenting the biblical message to his audience. The Spirit is also at work in the hearer—to testify to the truth of the biblical message, to illumine his thinking for understanding the message, to awaken his conscience to the conviction of sin and need, to give the gift of faith. The encoding and decoding is done with the touch of divine inspiration. The Spirit even works to close out distractions when the Word of God is preached. The Holy Spirit is the key element in the communication known as preaching.⁴⁸

Note the vast array of the Spirit's work in preaching, according to McDill. First, the Spirit operates in the preacher's preparation and proclamation. Second, the Spirit works

⁴⁵ Spurgeon, "The Holy Spirit in Connection with Our Ministry" in *Lectures to My Students*, 186-87.

⁴⁶ Cf. the chapter title by the same name in Azurdia, 97-115.

⁴⁷ McDill, 68.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

in the hearers in a number of ways. Third, the Spirit works in the interaction between preacher and listener, even to the removal of distraction for each. If McDill's claims about the Spirit's work receive admittance, then it follows that preaching ministry apart from the Spirit cannot be called true preaching. Spurgeon likely would concur.

Yet some who continue to practice the craft of preaching, either through ignorance, dereliction, or downright rebellion, will continue in their works without embracing the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the enterprise. They will continue to trust in techniques apart from Him, or they shall obtain words for their hearers from some source apart from Him. Such, no doubt, will continue to see little significant enduring spiritual fruit, and they may in God's mercy endure reproof for their error.

John Piper speaks to this in his work on preaching: "The dangers of self-reliance and self-exaltation in the ministry of preaching are so insidious that God will strike us if he must in order to break us of our self-assurance and the casual use of our professional techniques."⁴⁹ He states elsewhere in that same work, "Without this demonstration of Spirit and power in our preaching nothing of any abiding value will be achieved no matter how many people may admire our cogency or enjoy our illustrations or learn from our doctrine."⁵⁰ The Spirit must move mightily in the preaching enterprise or nothing of eternal significance occurs as a result of it. Moreover, trust in the techniques of homiletical craft to the exclusion of relationship with God *via* the Spirit impoverishes both hearer and preacher alike—and such trust grieves the Spirit, Whose ministry in preaching the Church sorely needs.

⁴⁹ Piper, 38.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

The temptation abounds to serve the Lord in the tasks ordained by Him by means not ordained of Him, and preaching succumbs to this all too often. This has not always been the general case, however. Others in earlier ages recalled better than we do today the words of Paul to the Corinthian believers: “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Cor 2:4-5). Certain men within nineteenth-century Southern Presbyterianism understood their need of the Holy Spirit in their preaching ministries—and welcomed Him in the same. An examination of each of four representative Southern Presbyterian preachers now ensues. Just as the Holy Spirit used these men mightily during their lifetimes, He uses both their published works and reminiscences concerning them to urge today’s preachers to embrace Him afresh as they prepare and deliver preaching unto the people of God.

An Important Caveat

Before proceeding to examine the presence of the Holy Spirit in the preaching ministries of our exemplars, we must note that at one or more of the areas outlined in this chapter, the evidence will be either thin or entirely missing. Several factors conspire to render some portions of the record scant or absent. First, the Southern Presbyterians under review here lived well over a century ago, and though we stand grateful for the record that remains, much of their production is now lost to us. Second, the reticence of the exemplars to state baldly, “See how I welcomed the Holy Spirit into my preaching ministry,” makes our task more difficult and our claims more tentative. Third, the biographers cited within the thesis-project do not write critically (Sean Michael Lucas on

R. L. Dabney excepted). They write appreciatively, even to the point of outright hagiography, and the line between objectivity and admiration becomes blurry at times. Finally, who can quantify the Infinite? The Holy Spirit, very God Himself, cannot be measured in human terms—and often, as will be the case here, His blessings cannot be quantified by man-made standards.

In addition to the caution regarding the non-empirical nature of this thesis, another caution must be cited. These exemplars, for all their evident godliness, ministerial skill, and fruitfulness in God’s Kingdom, held views regarding persons of color that must be repudiated in strongest terms. Not even Girardeau, who labored mightily among the slaves in antebellum Charleston, stood immune to the erroneous view that those who trace their ancestry to Africa are inherently inferior to those who trace their ancestry from English-speaking Europe.⁵¹ The new relationship between the races extant since the Emancipation Proclamation—validated militarily at Appomattox and constitutionally *via* the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments—vexed Dabney in particular. For about four years immediately following the end of the Civil War, Dabney pondered emigration as his proper response to the new situation.⁵² Though God elevated these men to eminent piety, usefulness, and affection in the southern Presbyterian churches, they nevertheless fall short of the perfection that the Law of God requires. Even the exemplars needed a Savior.

⁵¹ See Edward C. Jones, “Work among the Negroes,” in George A. Blackburn, ed., *The Life Work of John L. Girardeau* (Columbia, SC: The State Company; reprint edition Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1995), 41-42. Here Girardeau answered the objection that a church for slaves separate from their masters would fail to sanctify the relationship between slaves and masters—without challenging the prevailing cultural notion that Southern slavehood was ordained of God.

⁵² See the chapter entitled “Period of Desire to Emigrate (May 1865-May 1869)” in Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney* (1903, reprint Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977), 299-327.

These caveats need not lead to despair regarding the efficacy of the research or the validity of the conclusions. The caveats, however, do give rise to a needful modesty in view of the nature of the evidence. First, these men, though lionized by their contemporaries and biographers, each held a common glaring error regarding proper relations between the races in view of their fundamental equality before God. This fact does not make the exemplars' testimony worthless for the purpose of this thesis. On the contrary, this fact renders the exemplars more authentic and renders unto God His proper glory; He uses broken, imperfect vessels to perform His will. Second, the results obtained from the exemplars in view of this chapter's criteria, while falling short of the precision readily obtainable in the scientist's laboratory, display obvious evidences of the Holy Spirit. Empirical data rising to the level of proof required in many disciplines is impossible in this survey. What is possible, however, is a robust demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power in four preachers from nineteenth-century Southern Presbyterianism. To that demonstration we now proceed without further ado.

CHAPTER THREE: THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE PREACHING MINISTRY OF JAMES HENLEY THORNWELL (1812-1862)

Biography in brief

James Henley Thornwell, the first of our four Southern Presbyterian exemplars, was born December 9, 1812, in Marlboro County, South Carolina, in the northeastern section of that state drained by the Pee Dee River.¹ Thornwell's vast intellectual capacity manifested itself early in his boyhood, and others around him provided him such educational opportunities as his family's modest means could not obtain. Bereft of his father at the age of eight, Thornwell's mother moved their family closer to her kin, and then Thornwell began his relentless assault upon learning.

H. A. White remarks of Thornwell's thirst for knowledge, "A large part of every night, while others were asleep, he spent at work upon the lessons assigned for the following day, and in reading the volumes of history and literature that were furnished by kind neighbors."² Thornwell's reputation spread, and soon he enjoyed the patronage and lasting friendship of two leading men of the Pee Dee from nearby Cheraw: General James Gillespie, a wealthy planter, and W. H. Robbins, a prominent lawyer. These two men agreed to share the cost of Thornwell's education, and soon Thornwell boarded with Robbins, who oversaw his private studies and mentored him through the academy at Cheraw.

¹ I stand indebted for the following biographical material to Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell* (1875, reprint Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974); Douglas F. Kelly, *Preachers with Power: Four Stalwarts of the South* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1992); John Miller Wells, *Southern Presbyterian Worthies* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee on Publication, 1936).

² H. A. White, quoted in Wells, 13.

Douglas Kelly asserts, “It was assumed [Thornwell] would prepare for a career in law.”³ We readily see how this assumption formed. Thornwell received from Robbins opportunity for study, direct oversight of that education, and work in Robbins’s law office. Yet God had other plans for Thornwell. At the age of sixteen and before his conversion to Christ, he perceived himself called by God to be a minister. He felt the expectation of his supporters that he become a lawyer, and hence found himself in agony. Thornwell then set his views to paper, placed the writing under Robbins’s plate at the supper table, then went to Mr. Robbins’s piazza and wept bitterly.

Mr. Robbins took the letter in hand, went to his distraught protégé, took him by the hand, and led him back to the house. Robbins then restored Thornwell to his position and assured him that this call from God would be no obstacle to continued patronage and friendship. Though no professing Christian at this time, Robbins later heard and heeded God’s call to faith in Christ, and in his later years he became a devout Episcopalian.

Thornwell would follow a different ecclesiastical route, a route culminating in distinguished service to the Presbyterian Church in the South. He entered the junior class at South Carolina College (now the University of South Carolina) when only eighteen. Not fully grown and never robust, Thornwell seared a certain image upon those observing him. Forty years later a classmate described him thus:

In personal appearance he was, perhaps, the most unpromising specimen of humanity that has ever entered such an institution. Very short in stature, he was shorter by a head than he became later in life, very lean in flesh, with a skin the color of old parchment, his hand and face as thickly studded with black freckles as the Milky Way with stars, and an eye rendered dull in repose by a drooping lid. Such was the youth

³ Kelly, 62.

when first seen striding over the campus, as if burlesquing his own littleness by the contrast.”⁴

Yet Thornwell’s commanding intellect soon compelled the esteem and affection of his classmates, who to a man accorded him what he earned—the first place in the class.

After finishing his collegiate studies at Columbia in December 1831, Thornwell moved forty miles east to Sumter to teach school. There, while perusing a little book he obtained in Columbia, his life and eternity changed.

The little book, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, fascinated Thornwell. Of it he wrote, “For the first time I felt that I had met with a system which held together with the strictest logical connection; granting its premises, the conclusions were bound to follow.”⁵ John Miller Wells continues, “[Thornwell] studied carefully its text and proofs and accepted its premises. The conclusions confirmed him as a Calvinist, and made of him a Presbyterian.”⁶ Thornwell thus professed his faith in Christ, received baptism, and united with the Presbyterian church at Sumter in May 1832, and thereafter acted upon his former resolve to prepare for the ministry.

Thornwell felt he would obtain a better theological education in New England than in South Carolina; hence, he moved to Andover Seminary in Massachusetts, and for a brief time was a resident graduate student at Harvard. The prevailing New School theology and rampant Unitarianism in New England grieved Thornwell, and the severe winter climate nearly killed him. Hence he returned to Columbia Seminary to finish his study in divinity. In early 1835, Bethel Presbytery ordained Thornwell to the Gospel

⁴ Quoted in Wells, 11. Portions and other details of this account occur in Palmer, 53, and Kelly, 63. The classmate originating the account, alas, remains unnamed.

⁵ Wells, 16.

⁶ Ibid.

Ministry and placed in his hands the call of the new church at Lancaster. Soon Thornwell received the calls of the nearby Waxhaw Church and Six-Mile Church—all discharged concurrently. After his marriage to Nancy White Witherspoon in December 1835,⁷ he continued in his lower Piedmont pastorates until 1838, when his collegiate *alma mater* lay a call at his feet.

In 1838, Thornwell again came to Columbia, this time to teach logic and *belles lettres* at South Carolina College. Thornwell struggled throughout his all-too-brief life with his love and preference for academic life and his call to pastoral ministry. Hence, now begins an alternating series of service between the academy and the pulpit.

Thornwell left the College in 1840 to become the pastor of Columbia's First Presbyterian Church—only to return to the College two years later as professor of sacred literature and evidences of Christianity. This continued until 1851, when Thornwell accepted a brief pastorate at Charleston, only to be recalled by South Carolina College as chaplain and president. Finally, in 1856, Thornwell stepped into what he deemed his life work—the post of professor of didactic and polemic theology in Columbia Seminary. He served as professor until his health failed near the start of the Civil War. Thornwell went to be with the Lord on August 1, 1862, at the age of forty-nine.

John Miller Wells called Thornwell the greatest student and scholar the Southern Presbyterian Church ever produced.⁸ From Thornwell's mind through his pen flowed many of the distinctive doctrines of Southern Presbyterianism, such as his resistance to

⁷ Miss Witherspoon, later Mrs. Thornwell, was the daughter of South Carolina's lieutenant governor.

⁸ Wells, 12.

autonomous church boards in favor of committees answerable to the General Assembly,⁹ his view that the Church, being a spiritual entity, may make no statement regarding political questions, and his view that Presbyterian governance expressed the revealed will of God for ecclesiastical polity. In the final year of his life he essentially wrote the book of discipline for the Presbyterian churches in the Southern states. He sat as a voting member of ten General Assemblies, and served the Presbyterian Church as her moderator at the age of thirty-four—the youngest man ever to serve in that capacity. Thornwell's influence upon Southern Presbyterianism, even to this day, cannot be overstated. It behooves us now to see how Thornwell appropriated the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the preparation and delivery of sermons, in order that we may recover His ministry in our time.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit in Thornwell's Sermon Preparation

In chapter two we noted that a cardinal ministry of the Holy Spirit in preaching is His imparting to the preacher the conviction that Scripture is God's Word. Thornwell certainly affirmed this. In affirming what his tradition calls the subordinate standards,¹⁰ Thornwell affirmed that the Bible is the very Word of God.¹¹ Thornwell, in view of this affirmation, strove to order his thought and conduct in accordance with Scripture.

⁹ An extended discussion occurs in Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South: Volume 1, 1607-1861* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), 510-16.

¹⁰ For most Presbyterians the so-called subordinate standards are the documents produced by the Westminster Assembly (1643-48): *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, *The Westminster Larger Catechism*, and *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*. The primary standard is the Bible, the Word of God written.

¹¹ See, for example, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, i.4, and *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question and answer 2.

B. M. Palmer, the young admirer and later biographer of Thornwell, noted Thornwell's attitude toward God's Word: "Penetrated with the conviction that God can be known only so far as He has been pleased to reveal Himself, he bowed with perfect docility before the dogmatic authority of the Scriptures."¹² Palmer continues extolling Thornwell's high view of Scripture,

The writer has heard him say a dozen times, 'I have been cogitating upon such and such a subject, and can see no flaw in my reasoning, but I am gravelled with one verse in the Bible,' and then he would add, with inexpressible simplicity, 'You know, Palmer, that if there is but one passage of Scripture against us, our speculations must go to the winds.'¹³

Thornwell honored Scripture rightly as God's Word, and his production in every sphere—pulpit, popular press, and theological and other academic writing—bears witness to this fundamental conviction.

We now consider how the Holy Spirit affected Thornwell's study of Scripture. Sadly, the extant literature, so far as I can determine, gives no insight into how the Holy Spirit affected Thornwell in this realm. Perhaps the literature fails to mention the Holy Spirit in connection with Thornwell's study because of the long time elapsed since Thornwell's activity; he is the lone exemplar in this study that discharged the bulk of his life's work in the antebellum period. Perhaps the absence of any mention of the Holy Spirit in connection with Thornwell's exegesis and application of Scripture also is due to his reticence to write anything and to his hot displeasure with what he wrote. To his dear friend Robert Breckinridge, Thornwell wrote,

I have an aversion from writing, which makes it an intolerable burden. I have formed many a fine scheme, but find it almost impossible to overcome my mortal dislike of

¹² Palmer, 545.

¹³ Ibid.

the pen. I can hardly bear to read anything that I have written. It fills me with loathing and disgust. I fall so immeasurably short of my own conceptions of excellence, that I become disheartened and chagrined. I am afraid, therefore, that I shall never produce anything beyond such occasional lucubrations as involve no responsibility except to truth.¹⁴

It appears that Thornwell viewed his writing with undue harshness; history has viewed his writings much more favorably than he did. His works, the earliest of them now one hundred and eighty years old, remain in print. Yet the paucity of Thornwell's writings, especially in view of his prodigious intellectual faculties, leaves some gaps that beg filling, but currently in vain.

The Profound Degree of Unction in Thornwell's Preaching Ministry

Happily, more can be said of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the public side of Thornwell's preaching ministry. We begin by noting the evident unction, or divine empowerment, upon Thornwell's self and preaching. This unction, though difficult to define precisely, may be described with less difficulty. Unction involves God's validation of a preacher before the hearers. This sometimes comes only after a protracted struggle in the secret place with a sense of call, a sense of unworthiness and a perceived insufficiency for the preaching task. This struggle came providentially to Thornwell just before his first preaching engagement at Lancaster, South Carolina. Douglas Kelly reports:

But the crisis came as he entered the pulpit and began the service. Light from above then beamed in upon him, peace and joy filled his soul, and the Spirit of God unloosed his fettered lips. The question was settled, the victory was won, the divine anointing was bestowed; and the charmed hearers bore testimony to his power. And from that momentous hour he was a minister called and owned of the Lord.¹⁵

¹⁴ Wells, 44.

¹⁵ Kelly, 64.

Other voices soon would join those of the nascent Lancaster church. Of a sermon that Thornwell preached in 1843, Nathaniel Hewitt of Bridgeport, Connecticut, reported, “Howe, Owen, and Robert Hall, re-appear in him. The philosophical acumen of Howe, the gospel unction of Owen, and the rhetoric of Hall, unite in this discourse; and, in my humble opinion, no sermon has been produced in our country, in my day, in any pulpit, equal to it.”¹⁶ John Miller Wells testifies that this divine empowerment, this unction from the Holy Spirit, even fell upon Thornwell’s theological works. Wells notes, “Over all his theological writings there is that mysterious thing called unction. There is a fervor, an ecstasy of emotion, a mantle of beauty and of grace, that make a mighty impression upon the soul as well as the mind of the reader.”¹⁷ What can account for such divine empowerment? Are there conditions in which God is pleased to issue forth such empowerment?

Greg Heisler notes two essential qualities prerequisite to diving empowerment in preaching.¹⁸ The first quality prerequisite to unction Heisler calls Spirit-filled living. What Heisler calls Spirit-filled living corresponds to R. L. Dabney’s first qualification of the sacred orator: sincere, eminent piety.¹⁹ It cannot be expected that such a man would blow his own horn to announce his piety, but others gladly announce his close walk with God for him. The record provides abundant testimony to Thornwell’s eminent piety. B.

¹⁶ Palmer, 551, quoted in Kelly, 73.

¹⁷ Wells, 41.

¹⁸ See Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit’s Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2007), 132. For an extended discussion of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in the preaching enterprise, see *ibid.*, 126-53.

¹⁹ R. L. Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric, 1870* (reprint, Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1999, and retitled *Evangelical Eloquence: A Course of Lectures on Preaching*), 40, quoted in Kelly, 167.

M. Palmer writes of Thornwell, “Dr. Thornwell ripened in holiness to the hour of his translation. His humility became more profound, his faith more abiding, his love more glowing, his will chastened into deeper submission.”²⁰ His one-time co-pastor at Columbia’s First Presbyterian Church, F. P. Mullally, testifies to Thornwell’s piety, “He was emphatically a worshipper: not an admirer merely, but a worshipper of God in the fullest sense of the word. To him happiness lay in communion with God, and in working for God. . . . [Thornwell was] great in his profound humility before God.”²¹ John Miller Wells, quoting a source whose name became lost to him, nevertheless reveals the fundamental quality of Thornwell,

Above all, saintly in life, the expression in character and devotion and intensity of consecration of that mighty system of doctrine which not only mastered his intellect, but moulded all the deepest springs of his innermost personality. And thus the Theologian was the Saint, who poured out through press and pulpit and professor’s chair the combined stores of learning and genius and exalted saintliness.²²

The second essential quality prerequisite to unction, dependence upon God,²³ Thornwell exhibited as well. Note his prayer recorded in his journal from the date of his profession of faith in Christ:

O God! I have to-day made a public profession of my faith in the blessed Redeemer, and taken upon me the solemn covenant of the Church. I would not impute to myself any merit on this account, as I have only done, and that, too, after a long delay, what was expressly enjoined on me in Thy Holy Word. But, O God! I feel myself a weak, fallen, depraved, and helpless creature, and utterly unable to do one righteous deed without Thy gracious assistance. Wilt Thou, therefore, send upon me Thy cheering Spirit, to illumine me for the path of duty; and to uphold me, when I grow weary; to refresh me, when I faint; to support me against the violence of temptation and the blandishments of vice. Let me, I beseech Thee, please Thee in thought, word, and deed. Enable me to go on to perfection, support me in death, and

²⁰ Palmer, 563, quoted in Wells, 48.

²¹ Palmer, 566.

²² Wells, 49.

²³ Heisler, 133.

finally save me in Thy kingdom; and to the glorious Three-in-one be ascribed all the praise. Amen. Sumterville, May 13, 1832.²⁴

In this prayer we see an utter abasement of self, a total ascription for every good unto God, and an appeal to the Holy Spirit for growth in grace among the several lines mentioned. From the foregoing in this chapter, it appears that this temper continued in Thornwell as long as he lived. That such depth of feeling and thought could occur in a young man of nineteen is remarkable, yet Thornwell obviously was not an average young man. God would supernaturally empower this man of early high stance and promise for His purposes for the next thirty years in the body—and even longer *via* his writings and the surviving reminiscences about him.

The Holy Spirit's Ministry in Thornwell's Sermon Delivery

This chapter now turns to the more specific empowerments by which the Holy Spirit enabled Thornwell to fulfill God's will in the quarter-century leading to the Civil War. First, we consider Thornwell's so-called natural faculties at delivery. Thornwell brought several God-given, effort-developed abilities that display themselves both in the pulpit and out of it. Thornwell's boyhood sponsor recognized early vast intellectual promise in him, and that promise came to full fruition. Henry Ward Beecher spoke thus of Thornwell's mind, "By common fame, Dr. Thornwell was the most brilliant minister in the Old School Presbyterian Church, and the most brilliant debater in the General Assembly. This reputation he early gained and never lost. Whenever he was present in the Assembly, he was always the first person pointed out to a stranger."²⁵ In a visit to

²⁴ Palmer, 95.

²⁵ Palmer, 63, quoted in Kelly, 67.

Columbia from the great New England scholar, Edward Everett, Thornwell appeared to be the superior master of the material under discussion; while Everett rendered the Greek historian Thucydides in English translation, Thornwell rendered him from the Greek.²⁶ B. M. Palmer testifies to Thornwell's eloquence²⁷ and diction²⁸ as well. Thornwell had impressive intellectual and rhetorical ability, to be sure, but these abilities alone do not signify the Holy Spirit's power and presence in his preaching. There is more, however, that may help establish the case.

Douglas Kelly, in his book *Preachers with Power: Four Stalwarts of the South*, titles his unit on Thornwell "James Henley Thornwell: Logic on Fire."²⁹ Kelly argues this possible reason for Thornwell's fiery logic: "We may well believe that his logic was on fire because he was in direct contact with the living God who is a consuming fire. God used his preaching to bring congregations into touch with the purging, transforming reality of his own divine presence."³⁰ Thornwell's preaching had not the dry, dusty character of the university lecture. His preaching came with something else, namely, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. These so-called natural faculties God heightened to bring Himself glory and to bless His people. Now we look at the endowments of Thornwell that must be called supernatural.

²⁶ Palmer, 123, quoted in Kelly, 68.

²⁷ When Thornwell supplied B. M. Palmer's pulpit at First Presbyterian Church in New Orleans in early 1858, Palmer noted that many who heard Thornwell's discourses still regarded them in the mid-1870s as the standard of what pulpit eloquence should be—and this when Palmer had reached the height of his ministerial powers. This anecdote rises from Palmer, 431.

²⁸ See Palmer, 550.

²⁹ Kelly, 59-83.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

Douglas Kelly, quoting from one of the addresses in Columbia's First Presbyterian Church upon the centennial of Thornwell's birth, notes B. M. Palmer's description of Thornwell's preaching:

Kindling with a secret inspiration his manner lost its slight constraint; all angularity of gesture and awkwardness of posture suddenly disappeared; the spasmodic shaking of the head entirely ceased; his slender form dilated; his deep gray eye lost its drooping expression; the soul came and looked forth, lighting it up with a strange brilliancy; his frail body rocked and trembled as under a divine afflatus, as though the impatient spirit would rend its tabernacle and fly forth to God and heaven under the wings of his impassioned words; until his fiery eloquence rising with the greatness of his conceptions, burst upon the hearers in some grand climax, overwhelming in its majesty and resistless in its effect.³¹

According to Palmer's testimony, something more than mere human ability, though considerable in Thornwell's case, permeated his preaching. This something else, elusive in precise definition but welcome in pious preachers and hearers alike, is the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. In Palmer's narrative concerning Thornwell's preaching, certain less comely features of Thornwell's physique minimize and disappear, while Thornwell's soul, borne along by the Spirit's powerful tide, threatens to forsake its earthly tabernacle for higher realms. No rhetorical or homiletical technique can produce this. This is the finger of God. There is no other explanation.

Though Thornwell preached for only one year as solo incumbent at Columbia's First Presbyterian Church, and that early in his career, an unnamed later occupant of that pulpit said of Thornwell's tenure, "Never before or since was the gospel preached to

³¹ *Thornwell Centennial Addresses: Delivered Before the Synod of South Carolina in the First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, October 23, 24, 1912* (Published by Order of Synod, Spartanburg, SC, 1913), 16-17, quoted in Kelly, 61.

them with the eloquence and power with which it fell from his lips.”³² Here the Spirit conjoins an alleged natural faculty with a power that no human, no matter how devout, may conjure within himself to display His greatness through His chosen preacher. This continued, in God’s mercy, throughout Thornwell’s life in preaching. An example from late in Thornwell’s life will suffice.

In 1857 Thornwell toured through parts of Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee in behalf of Columbia Seminary, where he then served as professor.³³ B. M. Palmer notes that great power attended Thornwell’s preaching wherever he went. A South Carolinian, himself removed to Mississippi, told his friend, an eminent attorney, of Thornwell’s pulpit prowess. The lawyer thought the case exaggerated until hearing Thornwell at least six times within a two week span. The South Carolinian sums the whole, “The community was held entranced by his pulpit discourses; and after he left, my friend voluntarily said to me, ‘You did not tell me the fourth part.’”³⁴

Granted, effects alone do not signify the Holy Spirit’s power and presence—some arresting speakers worked evil ends.³⁵ Yet, as asserted in chapter two, God-ordained ends occur from God-ordained means accompanied by the Holy Spirit’s power and presence. Though the case is not empirically conclusive in Thornwell’s case—or in any exemplar’s case, for that matter—the preponderance of the extant material favors the Holy Spirit’s presence and power in Thornwell’s preaching, and Thornwell would be the first to own this fact.

³² Wells, 21.

³³ For the full account see Palmer, 423-24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 424.

³⁵ For example, Adolf Hitler.

The Effects of Thornwell's Preaching

The testimonies at the preaching of Thornwell abound. Did the Holy Spirit change lives through Thornwell's preaching work? Evidence that the Spirit worked good effects and changed lives through Thornwell's preaching. First, Thornwell himself called for change and amendment in his sermons. Kelly writes, "We are not surprised to find throughout the preaching of Thornwell a continual call to conversion, and an instant urging to faith and repentance... One merely has to read the last three or four pages of almost any of his sermons to see his emphasis on an appropriate response to the message."³⁶ Consider the following examples.

In the sermon entitled "The Personality of the Holy Ghost," Thornwell urges near the end not to grieve the Holy Spirit, but rather to prize Him as our hope.³⁷ Regarding the callings of the Christian, and efforts in the same, Thornwell urges, "All have some influence, all have some work assigned to them, and it is the duty of all to be just in that part of the field which the Redeemer has allotted to them."³⁸ More emphatically, Thornwell pleads with his hearers to spare no effort to reach all nations with the Gospel, saying, "Can we face the Saviour by whose stripes we were healed—can we encounter the rebuke of that eye which melted Peter into penitence and shame—when we confront the dying millions in reference to whom we must have the agonizing consciousness that we have made no sacrifice for their souls?"³⁹ As elsewhere in this thesis, other examples

³⁶ Kelly, 76.

³⁷ *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, 366. The fuller exhortation occurs *ibid.*, 363-67.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 407, from the sermon entitled "Christian Effort." The full exhortation occurs *ibid.*, 406-07.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 447, from the sermon entitled "The Sacrifice of Christ the Type and Model of Missionary Effort." The full final exhortation occurs *ibid.*, 445-49.

abound, but these suffice. Thornwell called for change and amendment in his sermons, and he presses this point upon his fellow preachers: “Sinai and Calvary alike urge the minister to be earnest; he must lift his voice like a trumpet until the sinner hears his warning and obeys his instructions.”⁴⁰

Second, the good effects and changed lives of Thornwell’s hearers now enter these pages on parade. John Miller Wells notes the effect of Thornwell’s preaching upon a presumably converted house at the General Assembly in Indianapolis: “Of the matchless beauty of the style, of the greatness of the subject matter, and of the power effect upon his congregations, there can be no question. During a great sermon before the General Assembly at Indianapolis, the whole congregation was melted into tears.”⁴¹ Given the generally staid nature of Presbyterian worship, this is indeed remarkable to see such worshippers moved to open emotional expression.

Early in his Lancaster pastorate, Thornwell forgot himself and preached beyond the orthodox thirty to sixty minute time limit and reached ninety minutes. He recovered himself and apologized to the congregation. As one the congregation cried out, “Go on! Go on!” and Thornwell preached another hour. This testifies to God’s power in Thornwell, to be sure, but more remains. An elderly gentleman, after Thornwell’s sermon, sent for his son and testified that though he was a student of God’s salvation all his life, now he had firmer grasp of it than ever and professed his readiness to die. That gentleman never entered the Lancaster church again, but went to Heaven shortly after Thornwell’s momentous sermon. He received assurance, consolation, and perhaps

⁴⁰ From Thornwell’s sermon “The Gospel Ministry,” quoted in Kelly, 77.

⁴¹ Wells, 48.

salvation *via* the final sermon he heard. It appears, then, that God used Thornwell's preaching as means to His good ends late in the life of this unnamed man.⁴²

Thornwell tasted what many who preach the glorious gospel of the blessed God taste: a poor feeling about the preaching event just completed. Yet Thornwell discovered what many similarly situated find by God's grace: that He has worked mightily through what appears to be an inferior discourse. Palmer narrates the occurrence in Thornwell's life:

Several years ago, he was travelling near Yorkville;⁴³ came to a sacramental meeting, and preached a sermon, than which he never preached a meaner in his life; got on his horse, and sneaked away, that he might see nobody. Two years afterward, he was passing over the same ground; came to the same place at another sacramental meeting; when two persons came forward to unite with the church, who traced their convictions to that 'abominable sermon,' which, he still thought, was the poorest of his life.⁴⁴

God used even the weakest effort of Thornwell's pulpit ministry to usher souls into His Kingdom; herein is strong evidence of the Spirit's empowerment of Thornwell's ministry *via* changed lives.

To aspiring preachers in Columbia Seminary, Thornwell, "urged them constantly to seek the illumination of the Holy Spirit, his unction, his blessing, and—as was so amply illustrated by the sermons of this master preacher himself—to seek the fire of the altar to fall on the offering of their preaching."⁴⁵ This thesis-project concurs with Thornwell along this line for a recovery of Spirit-empowered preaching in our time.

⁴² The full account occurs at Palmer, 131-32.

⁴³ Possibly at the current city of York, South Carolina, the county seat of York County (which includes Rock Hill), which touches the North Carolina state line just south of Charlotte.

⁴⁴ Palmer, 556.

⁴⁵ Kelly, 83.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE PREACHING MINISTRY OF ROBERT LEWIS DABNEY (1820-1898)

Biography in brief

Robert Lewis Dabney was born March 5, 1820, on his father's farm on the South Anna River in Louisa County, Virginia, and grew to maturity there in southside Virginia.¹ He received his earliest education in the field schools of the day, and afterward he studied at nearby Hampden-Sydney College (1836-37), where he excelled both in study and conduct and, above this, made his profession of faith in Christ in September 1837.² Two years after study at Hampden-Sydney, Dabney entered The University of Virginia and earned the Master of Arts degree there in 1842.

Thomas Cary Johnson mused that Dabney resolved to study for the ministry even before his attendance at Virginia, but held his peace until very near the end of his studies at Charlottesville.³ After a two-year hiatus in his education, during which he assisted his widowed mother with farm management and operated a school, he entered Union Seminary—then located not at Richmond, but at Hampden-Sydney—in the fall of 1844. He came to the Seminary a candidate for the ministry within West Hanover Presbytery. He completed his ministerial studies in less than two years, thus graduating in 1846 with the usual certificate awarded to those who sustained the full Seminary curriculum.⁴ West

¹ For the ensuing biographical information about Dabney I am indebted to Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney* (1903, reprint Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), and Sean Michael Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2005).

² Lucas notes, "Dabney's piety, another mark of his gentleman status, was unquestioned. He credited his profession of faith to 'a powerful and genuine awakening' . . . Afterward, Dabney was fully committed to Christian piety and particularly to the Old School Presbyterian heritage" (Lucas, 30).

³ Johnson, 76.

⁴ Ibid., 95. In those days Union Seminary did not bestow degrees (ibid., 89).

Hanover Presbytery, on May 4, 1846, licensed Dabney to preach the Gospel and assigned him a home missionary assignment of three communities in his home county. From this assignment his preaching labor began in earnest.

Dabney served in his home county for a year, and then he moved from his beloved southside Virginia to the Blue Ridge Mountains in the western part of the state. The Tinkling Spring Church in Augusta County extended Dabney a call on April 18, 1847. He accepted the call, was ordained by the Presbytery on July 16, and spent the next six years there. While on that field God favored Dabney with a wife, young children, and a season of revival. This revival, in addition to doing much good in the life of Tinkling Spring Church and its surrounding community, furthered Dabney's growing reputation as a preacher. His gifts as a writer became known to a wider audience through his publications in various Presbyterian house organs, such as the *Watchman and Observer* and the *Southern Presbyterian Review*. Soon the electors of Union Seminary, in their collective wisdom presumably guided by the Holy Spirit, elected Dabney to the chair of Ecclesiastical History and Polity at Union Seminary, his *alma mater*, and here he spent the vast majority of his productive years.

Dabney would spend the next thirty years (1853-83) at Union Seminary.⁵ The first six of those years Dabney taught ecclesiastical history and polity, and for the next twenty-four years he taught systematic and polemic theology. From these two professorships he became one of the great voices in antebellum and immediate postbellum Southern Presbyterianism. One wonders how he could write so tirelessly, instruct in the Seminary with such effectiveness, and conduct extensively tiresome

⁵ The Trustees of Union Seminary accorded Dabney the honorary Doctor of Divinity degree upon his election as Seminary professor in the summer of 1853 (ibid., 136).

ministry—including service for a brief period during the Civil War as Confederate Gen. Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson’s chief of staff and for a more extended period as co-pastor of the College Church at Union Seminary/Hampden-Sydney College. At the height of his powers Dabney ranked among the giants of Southern Presbyterianism. He resisted the flattering calls to a professorship at Princeton Seminary in New Jersey, at the time *the* great American Presbyterian seminary, and to the pastorate of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City. Nothing could dissuade him from his life’s passion: to build the Presbyterian Church in his beloved South—and particularly in his especially dear Virginia.

The triumph of the Union forces in the Civil War, and the attendant defeat of the Confederate forces, marked Dabney the rest of his days. He apparently never recovered from Confederate defeat, and for several years afterward contemplated emigration from the reunited American states. Love for his family, his subjected South, his Union Seminary, and his Southern Zion that was the Presbyterian Church in the old Confederacy held him in southside Virginia until 1883. Then, with years advancing and health failing, Dabney moved to a better climate for his final years and for his final season of sustained service to the Church.

He arrived in Austin, Texas, to occupy the Chair of Mental and Moral Philosophy and Political Economy in a then-fledgling land-grant institution now among the largest in America: The University of Texas. He taught there for eleven years, the last four while stricken with total blindness, and worked to establish a theological seminary in Texas, now the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. After teaching at The University of Texas, in the last years of his productive life, Dabney gave occasional lectures at

Louisville (Kentucky) Presbyterian Theological Seminary and at Davidson College, a Presbyterian college just north of Charlotte, North Carolina. He made a final General Assembly appearance, emotional for many, at the 1897 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States,⁶ held that year in Charlotte. On January 3, 1898, God called his servant home at the age of seventy-seven.

The laurels attending Dabney's ministry rest deservedly upon him: faithful Christian man, able Presbyterian preacher, commanding intellect evidenced in classroom and in publication, and devoted member of his family, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the South at large. Most of what he upheld was right, even sterling; some of what he upheld, matters held in common with most franchised folk of his generation, must be rejected. The preceding sketch presents Dabney as he was: imperfect, to be sure, but nevertheless a servant used specially of God for an extended time.⁷

Against the foregoing biographical backdrop we now view Dabney's preaching, and in particular we view the role of the Holy Spirit within it.

The Holy Spirit's Involvement in Dabney's Sermon Preparation

The Holy Spirit convinces Christians generally, and preachers in particular, that Scripture is the Word of God. The extant literature confirms that Dabney's viewed

⁶ This was the denominational name for those Presbyterians who separated in 1861 from their Northern brethren and continued a separate existence in the states of the old Confederacy. Reunion did not occur until 1983.

⁷ Dabney's *Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology* remained the theology textbook at Union Seminary until 1940 (Lucas, 15). Ernest Trice Thompson, longtime professor of church history in Union Seminary, noted of Dabney, "Through his teaching, his students, and his textbook, Dr. Dabney probably did more to mold theological thinking in the Southern Presbyterian Church than any other person" (Ernest Trice Thompson: *Presbyterians in the South, Volume 3: 1890-1972* [Richmond, VA.: John Knox Press, 1973], 208).

Scripture this way. Within the collection of his lectures in systematic theology, almost as an aside, Dabney notes, “I need only add, that I hold the Scriptures to be, in all its parts, of plenary inspiration; and we shall henceforward assume this, as proved by the inquiries of another department.”⁸ In affirming the plenary inspiration of Scripture, Dabney stood in a line of thought extending back at least to the time of Protestant scholasticism (the seventeenth century) that stated that the Bible is inspired by God and therefore without error in what it teaches.⁹

The notion that Scripture contains no error in what it teaches, namely, the infallibility of Scripture, Dabney affirms. He assumes the infallibility of Scriptures in *Systematic Theology*¹⁰ and affirms it elsewhere.¹¹ This infallibility of Scripture, for Dabney, rests upon his view of Scripture’s ultimate authorship. He held that Scripture fundamentally is the work of the infallible Holy Spirit rather than of fallible human authors. The books of Scripture came not from several sources, but from one ultimate source—and that divine.¹² Dabney makes other allusions to this central claim throughout his work. Two examples will suffice. First, in establishing the central task of the preacher as herald, Dabney encourages his ministerial students to consult the Holy

⁸ R. L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (1878, reprint Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 144.

⁹ For background on the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, especially verbal plenary inspiration, see Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Collier Books, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Company, 1964), 132. The case that Dabney affirmed *verbal* plenary inspiration (that the Holy Spirit actually dictated the words of Scripture in the original languages) is circumstantial at best.

¹⁰ Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 144.

¹¹ For example, in *Sacred Rhetoric*, 75, where Dabney alludes to the infallibility of Scripture.

¹² Dabney, from a sermon entitled, “The Bible Is Its Own Witness” in *Discussions, Volume 1: Evangelical and Theological* (1891, reprint Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1967), 121.

Spirit's word choice in the New Testament.¹³ Second, in upholding virtue before his ministerial students from the book of Proverbs, Dabney alludes to the Holy Spirit speaking through Solomon.¹⁴ Based on the foregoing, Dabney could affirm unequivocally what other preachers in his theological tradition affirm: The Bible is the Word of God written, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.¹⁵

Unfortunately, the literature surveyed reveals no explicit mention of the Holy Spirit's leadership of Dabney to a given text. He reveals his method in *Sacred Rhetoric* when he extols the method called today *continuous lection*.¹⁶ By this practice, a practice that Dabney called *expository preaching*, congregations best heard the full argument of the Holy Spirit presented in a given book. The actual selection of the texts, or the books through which to preach, Dabney referred to the preacher's pastoral experience and good judgment.¹⁷ Dabney's biographer, Thomas Cary Johnson, attributed to him a large measure of what he called *sanctified common sense*, and perhaps the Holy Spirit through Dabney's natural intellectual faculties informed his views about the selection of a text for preaching. To what degree, however, the Spirit informed Dabney cannot be determined with certainty.

Exegesis concerns itself with obtaining the meaning of the text selected for preaching, and upon this topic Dabney delivered mightily, and in a manner consistent

¹³ Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 36. The words alluded to are the Greek noun *keryx* (κηρυξ), "a herald," and the Greek verb *kerusso* (κηρυσσω), "I preach" (translations mine).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁵ This affirmation is subsumed within the affirmation required of ordinands within the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. See *The Book of Order: The Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, Book of Government 14.1.A.2.

¹⁶ See the chapter in Dabney's *Sacred Rhetoric* entitled "The Text," 74-92.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

with his views of Scripture noted earlier. In *Sacred Rhetoric* Dabney exhorts his pupils, “[The preacher] has naught to do save to deliver God’s message out of the Scriptures; his only concern is with the intended meaning of the Holy Ghost in the place expounded.”¹⁸ For Dabney, not only the words of Scripture *per se*, but also their arrangement, comes to us as the expressed will of the Holy Spirit. The preacher, then, must unfold the argument of his sermon just as the Holy Spirit unfolds the argument of the passage.¹⁹ If the meaning of the Holy Spirit in a preaching portion remains unclear to the preacher, the preacher does better not to enter the pulpit until he receives heavenly light upon the subject. Says Dabney here, “The exact mind of the Spirit in the text must then be ascertained, before you presume to preach upon it.”²⁰

Dabney’s View and Welcome of the Holy Spirit’s Gift of Unction

Dabney, once again addressing his ministerial students at Union Seminary, exhorted them to fidelity to the argument of the Holy Spirit in a given preaching portion, and thereafter he appended a promise: “Have faith and humility to trust his truth in his own biblical forms, and you will find your sermons clothed with a true power and unction. If you thus honour his word, he will honour your ministry with success.”²¹ Dabney later in the text describes more precisely how the Spirit may elevate the preacher along this line. The preacher, if the Spirit’s unction be present, may expect within his

¹⁸ Ibid., 67.

¹⁹ Ibid., 78.

²⁰ Ibid., 98. This claim of Dabney finds a contemporary champion in Jay Adams, who urges preachers to discover the *telos*, or Spirit-intended purpose, in a given passage before preaching it. See Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: The Urgent Task of Homiletics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

²¹ Ibid., 89.

soul a multiplication of love, pity, tenderness, zeal and seriousness as he undertakes the preaching task.²² This cannot be affected, according to Dabney. This anointing, as he calls it, comes directly from the Spirit of God, and it is an abhorrence to pretend to be affected in such a way. The Spirit of God, according to Dabney, will crown faithful exegesis with power from on high. One other chief trait remains needful.

The other necessary qualification for divine empowerment is eminent piety in the preacher himself. Dabney testifies to the necessity of such piety in the preacher before the Spirit bestows His unction upon the preacher, “Although not identical with ardent piety, [unction] is the effluence of ardent piety alone.”²³ The Holy Spirit, according to Dabney, takes this pious soul and endues it with His power to accomplish the highest possible good in preaching. Then Dabney avers again, “Only the eminent Christian can be an eminent preacher of the Gospel.”²⁴ Dabney considered personal piety so integral to unction in preaching that he devoted an entire lecture to his students to the topic.²⁵

The evidence of Dabney’s own empowerment in the preaching event follows shortly. Suffice it to say here that Dabney had much to say concerning the work of the Spirit in preparation for the preaching event—a work he embraced and disseminated through lecture and publication. That which occurs in the study and private prayer closet necessarily gushes forth in the pulpit from the preacher. What came forth from Dabney, based upon the foregoing survey? The literature reveals significant supernatural

²² Ibid., 116. The full discussion occurs *ibid.*, 115-17.

²³ Ibid., 116-17.

²⁴ Ibid., 117.

²⁵ See Dabney, “Preacher’s Character with Hearers” in *Sacred Rhetoric*, 261-70.

endowment of Dabney as he preached and significant supernatural fruit borne as a result of his preaching.

The Holy Spirit's Empowerment of Dabney's Sermon Delivery

Dabney sought to determine what God intended to say and how God intended to say what He said. He also sought, by all accounts, to walk with exemplary piety before the Church and the world. From the time Dabney confessed Christ, when he was seventeen, his devout walk before God was unquestioned.²⁶ Contemporaries of Dabney accorded him such qualities as meekness, humility, generosity in the judgment of characters, and the like. The same sources note his God-given freedom from base affections, slander, falsehood, and hypocrisy.²⁷ Thomas Cary Johnson wrote of Dabney, “Many men who sat under him, in the early years of his professorial life, have given expression to their conviction that Dr. Dabney was then the most Godly man they had ever seen.”²⁸ Johnson gives a further citation from later in Dabney's life, when optical blindness had overtaken him, “With age and blindness there came upon him a beautiful mellowed sweetness of character, and ‘his great heart dropped unction on any creature around him.’”²⁹ A final tribute to Dabney's piety now occurs, “As a holy man, he deserves to be ranked with Augustine and Calvin, Owen and Baxter and Edwards.”³⁰ In light of Dabney's own prerequisites for divine empowerment in preaching, and in light of

²⁶ Lucas, 30.

²⁷ Lucas, *ibid.*, and Johnson, 549-50.

²⁸ Johnson, 550.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Johnson, 567.

his satisfaction of the prerequisites, we may expect that God supernaturally empowered his preaching—and we shall not be disappointed.

The great evidence that the Holy Spirit infused Dabney's preaching occurs in the realm of lives changed upon hearing his preaching. He came not possessed of compelling oratorical skill (such as the other exemplars in this study possessed), but he came with great pulpit intensity and great desire to teach from the pulpit,³¹ and God rewarded Dabney's person and efforts with ministerial success. At Tinkling Spring, Virginia, God granted the church there led by Dabney a season of revival. Dabney himself preached the revival sermons, without the aid of guest ministers, during the summer of 1850. He preached his usual two sermons per Sunday plus one on Wednesday, and he added protracted meetings to the weekly schedule that summer. After about six weeks the revival season ebbed.

Dabney remarked later upon the season, "One thing very gratifying to me was that almost all who ever attended inquiry meetings made a profession of religion, and the most of them a highly credible profession."³² The number of conversions arising from Dabney's preaching during the summer of 1850, especially given the small size of his church, was remarkable. The Session of Tinkling Spring church received thirty-three members into the church during 1850;³³ of those, twenty-nine came during the six-week revival.³⁴ This was the largest number of members admitted to Tinkling Spring in twenty

³¹ Lucas, 51.

³² Johnson, 113, and Lucas, 48.

³³ Johnson, 114.

³⁴ Lucas, 48.

years,³⁵ and though Dabney served six years total at the church, the number of conversions in 1850 alone nearly equaled the total conversions from the other five years of his pastorate.³⁶ During the Tinkling Spring revival of 1850, God bore true, lasting fruit through Dabney's preaching in the form of converted souls.

Years later Dabney served several military units of the Confederacy as chaplain. Of particular interest is his service in the Eighteenth Virginia Volunteers during the summer of 1861. Dabney found that gathering of soldiers ripe for a spiritual harvest. He noted in a letter to his friend, Moses D. Hoge, that he found the religious sentiment as great as he had ever known it in any community not in actual revival and, as a result, he preached with as much freedom and satisfaction as he had ever felt anywhere.³⁷ This freedom in preaching, another evidence of divine empowerment, had its effect, both in conversion and edification. Thomas Cary Johnson records,

He was blessed with the sight of men won to Christ through his ministry, and with saints edified. To name two conspicuous instances: His Colonel, Mr. Withers, dated his conversion to a Thanksgiving sermon, which his chaplain preached, on Thursday night, after the battle of Manassas, and 'Stonewall' Jackson, as he came to be known after this battle, took high delight in his preaching, so far as he was able to hear it during the summer.³⁸

Jackson, a noteworthy Christian of the era, came away from this early encounter with Dabney with such a high view of him that he invited Dabney to become his adjutant-general, or chief of staff, with leave to preach to the soldiers on Sundays.³⁹ From

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Johnson, 114.

³⁷ From a letter from Dabney to Moses D. Hoge dated June 28, 1861, alluded to in Johnson, 238.

³⁸ Johnson, 238.

³⁹ The account of Dabney's service to Gen. Jackson rises from Johnson, 261-72.

Dabney's wartime service as preacher we see people converted to Christ, His redeemed further upbuilt, and increasing opportunities for ministerial service—and all of this from the Holy Spirit.

Some see changed lives after hearing preaching as testimony to the preacher's powers of persuasion: oratorical, personal, or otherwise. Dabney would refute this in strongest terms. No human can convict of sin; that work properly belongs to the Holy Spirit—and to the Spirit alone.⁴⁰ Dabney also affirmed that though the preacher does well to attempt to persuade people to receive Christ and continue in Him, he has no power in himself to effect the persuasion. Only the Holy Spirit can persuade fallen people to receive and to persevere in the things of God.⁴¹ This combination of human rhetorical art and divine empowerment Dabney found in the preaching of Jonathan Edwards and James Henley Thornwell, and he commended these exemplary men to establish his point: the Spirit is the ultimate Persuader, and, hence, the ultimate agent of true change in the redeemed.⁴²

From the foregoing we see the evident presence and power of the Holy Spirit in Dabney's preaching. In Dabney's study, in his personal communion with God, in his delivery, and in the aftereffects of his preaching we see God's divine empowerment of his preaching. Not only did the Holy Spirit empower Dabney's preaching, but also He empowered the preaching of two generations of pastors rising from Union Seminary and

⁴⁰ Lucas, 52.

⁴¹ Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 239.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 243.

Austin Seminary to service in the Southern Presbyterian Church. Above even this, Dabney's works remain available in print today to guide ever-succeeding generations of preachers to embrace the Holy Spirit's power and presence as *the* indispensable portion of the preaching endeavor.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE PREACHING MINISTRY OF JOHN LAFAYETTE GIRARDEAU (1825-1898)

Biography in brief

John Lafayette Girardeau was born on November 14, 1825, on James Island, South Carolina, not far from Charleston.¹ As the name suggests, Girardeau descended from the French Huguenots who settled in the South Carolina Lowcountry during that state's early colonial period.² He received an outstanding education in his boyhood—an education that prepared him to enter the College of Charleston just before his fifteenth birthday. Not long after Girardeau entered the College of Charleston, God effectually called him to faith in Christ and engendered within him a desire to serve in vocational ministry—but this only after something approaching agony afflicted Girardeau's soul.

Girardeau endured a month of what Douglas Kelly called terrible conviction and utter gloom concerning his spiritual state. George Blackburn, the son-in-law and able biographer of Girardeau, records the case:

He was afraid to put out his light at night lest the darkness should never end. He was afraid to go to sleep lest he should awake in the company of the damned. He had no appetite for food. He could not study. No earthly thing interested him. He spent his time reading the Bible, calling on God for mercy and bemoaning his lost estate. In vain did he strive to make peace with God; he wept over the consequences of his sins, but there was no sense of pardon; he tried to repent and reform, but there was no

¹ The biographical material here presented rises from the biography edited by Girardeau's son-in-law, George A. Blackburn, *The Life Work of John L. Girardeau, D.D., LL.D* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1916, reprint Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1995, and hereinafter referred to as *Life Work*), and from Douglas F. Kelly, *Preachers with Power: Four Stalwarts of the South* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992).

² Kelly, 121.

peace; he strove to make covenants and agreements with God, but the earth was iron and the heavens were brass.³

Blackburn records the happy outcome that occurred some days or weeks later:

One beautiful morning while on his knees begging for mercy, it occurred to him that he had already done everything that it was possible for him to do, and that all of these things had availed him nothing. He would, therefore, just surrender himself to Jesus and leave the case in his hands. This was faith. Instantly the Holy Spirit assured him that he was accepted in Christ, that his sins were forgiven, and that God loved him with an everlasting love. He sprang to his feet, clapped his hands, and poured out the overflowing joy of his soul in praise. All nature had changed. In the description of his feelings he said that the sun shone brighter, the birds sang sweeter, and the breezes blew softer than he had ever known them to do. His flesh as well as his heart felt the delight of the presence of a reconciled God. He could see no reason why any intelligent creature could care to do anything in this world but love and praise God.⁴

Doubtless this soul-shaking experience also proved a soul-strengthening one, for the subsequent life and ministry that Girardeau discharged testifies to God's great power in his life.

Girardeau completed his course of study in the College of Charleston in 1844, taught locally for a year, and then moved to Columbia to study at Columbia Seminary. There he met two persons ordained by God to affect his life powerfully: James Henley Thornwell in the Seminary and Benjamin Morgan Palmer in the pulpit of Columbia's First Presbyterian Church. These two men, more than any other, shaped the theology and ministry of their slightly younger colleague—and, consequently, placed Girardeau squarely within the grand tradition that was nineteenth century Southern Presbyterianism.

Girardeau graduated Columbia Seminary in 1848, and in the fall of that year Charleston Presbytery granted him license to preach the Gospel. During his period of licensure, Girardeau married, and from that happy union issued ten children in due

³ Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 23, quoted in Kelly, 122.

⁴ Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 23-24, quoted in Kelly, 123.

course. He was licensed for not quite two years before his ordination to the ministry by Charleston Presbytery in June 1850. From that ordination he would serve Christ in His Church for forty-five years of active ministry—a term almost equally divided by turns between the pastorate and the professorship.

Girardeau, like many men of Southern birth, simply adored the land of his birth and, hence, never left it. He gave his entire service to his home state. In the antebellum period he served with distinction in the Anson Street Presbyterian Church of Charleston, a mission church to the slaves initially under the auspices of Charleston's Second Presbyterian Church, but later granted an independent existence under the name of Zion Presbyterian Church. From a beginning membership of thirty-six souls in 1854, the church swelled to over six hundred communicants by the onset of the Civil War. The slaves thronged to the church building to attend Girardeau's preaching, along with many sympathetic slave owners. Attendance ran significantly higher than membership. This attests well to Girardeau's gifts in preaching, but he also exhibited noteworthy skill as an administrator. He divided the congregation into classes of fifty with each class under the supervision of a class leader for benevolent aid to sick members, for the baptism of newborn children, and for general mutual Christian encouragement.

The Civil War interrupted this happy service for Girardeau, and he, ever the true patriot, served the Twenty-Third Regiment, South Carolina Volunteers, Confederate States of America, as its chaplain. This service Girardeau undertook for nearly four years (June 1861-April 1865), a service that ended only with Girardeau's capture by Federal forces in the final days of the Confederacy. From this meritorious service, generally to

the Southern soldiers but also to the Northern soldiers dying upon the battlefield, Girardeau returned to his beloved Charleston to resume his usual ministry.

Girardeau returned to Charleston to find the Zion property barred to his use, owing to the United States Government's seizure of the property. Hence, the Zion church merged with Charleston's Glebe Street Presbyterian Church to form Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street—and at this post Girardeau remained ten further years. Then, in January 1876, Girardeau yielded to God's call through the larger Church to become professor of polemic and didactic theology in his *alma mater*, Columbia Seminary. Here he added another laurel, first-rank teacher of future Presbyterian pastors, to his earlier, better-known laurel: first-rank preacher of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Girardeau continued in this office until his seventieth birthday, in 1895, and in this office he displayed himself as perhaps the greatest philosopher and theologian in the Southern Presbyterian church—Dabney possibly excepted. Also, from 1886 forward, Girardeau preached on Sunday afternoons in Columbia's Second (now Arsenal Hill) Presbyterian Church⁵ under the ministry of his son-in-law, the aforementioned George A. Blackburn.

Very soon after Girardeau retired from active ministry he suffered a stroke that left him partially paralyzed on one side. Upon hearing this news R. L. Dabney, himself totally blind, came to visit Girardeau and preached at Arsenal Hill. Blackburn notes upon this especially moving service of preaching and singing:

When the service was over the two came down the aisle together; they were men of imposing presence, each like the son of a king; their faces showed the influence of chastening grace; their foreheads betokened the might of the intellects behind them; venerable men! Dignity, goodness, and greatness sat with ease and naturalness upon them. . . . And so, blind and lame these princes of Israel walked on, talking of the past

⁵ Both this church and the First Presbyterian Church of Columbia now affiliate themselves with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

and future worship of God. A few months after this meeting they both joined the general assembly of the church of the first born in the majestic worship of their God and Savior.⁶

Indeed Girardeau never regained full health, and just as Dabney removed to glory in January of 1898, so also Girardeau entered into Heaven on June 23, 1898, at the age of seventy-two.

Like the other men noted in this study, Girardeau showed himself a preacher of the first rank and a professor of the highest aptitude. Though regrettably representative of his time and place in his views regarding persons of color, he nevertheless undertook to bless them in the Name of Christ with singular zeal—both before and after emancipation. The balance of this study of John L. Girardeau will display the underlying secret of Girardeau’s ministerial success: the great power and presence of the Holy Spirit in his preaching ministry—a Power and Presence that Girardeau welcomed.

The Holy Spirit’s Involvement in Girardeau’s Sermon Preparation

The examination of the Holy Spirit’s role in the preaching ministry of John L. Girardeau now proceeds under four heads. First, Girardeau held the unshakable conviction that Scripture is the very Word of God—nothing less and nothing else. His Christian piety, of which more will be said a bit later, had its ground in his, “unswerving intellectual and moral commitment to the inerrant truth of Scripture.”⁷ This conviction that Scripture is God’s Word, as alluded earlier, shaped Girardeau’s view on a host of

⁶ Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 368, quoted in Kelly, 141 (ellipsis mine).

⁷ Kelly, 167. For a more systemic statement from Girardeau on his high view of Scripture, see the chapters entitled “The Inspiration of the Scriptures” and “The Authority of the Scriptures” within his *Discussion of Theological Questions* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee on Publication, 1905), 273-392 (referenced in Kelly, 187n.79).

other matters outside the proper sphere of this thesis-project. A strong proponent of the Puritan regulative principle in worship, he decried among other perceived innovations the use of instrumental music in worship—because it had no perceived expressed warrant under the New Covenant.⁸ This high view of Scripture led him to forbid women to preach, though he held this view charitably, without slighting her worth or dignity before God.⁹ Girardeau's commitment to Scripture as God's Word necessitated his vigorous anti-evolutionary stance and subsequent contest with his colleague at Columbia Seminary, James Woodrow.¹⁰ This high view of Scripture necessarily affected Girardeau's stance and his work in the pulpit as well.

Not only did Girardeau hold that Scripture is God's Word, but he preached Scripture in concert with his conviction—and not as those, just coming into vogue, who held that men, and not God, fundamentally wrote Scripture. A Girardeau admirer wrote, “He was, too, most faithful in preaching Divine truth. He received the Bible with unwavering faith and ardent devotion as the very word of God, and he never turned aside from it to preach science or philosophy or any other doctrines of men.”¹¹ He preached Scripture, the written Word which reveals the living Word, Jesus Christ—and he strayed not from this to lesser matters while at God's sacred desk. The authority in the pulpit, according to Girardeau, derives from Scripture; hence, no subject may be broached in the

⁸ For a fuller elaboration of Girardeau's views along this line, see his sermon entitled “The Discretionary Power of the Church” in George A. Blackburn, ed., *Sermons by John L. Girardeau, D.D., LL.D.* (Columbia: The State Company, 1907; reprint Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1995, and hereinafter referred to as *Sermons*), 369-412.

⁹ R. A. Webb, “The Presbyterian,” in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 217-18.

¹⁰ A full rendering of this controversy occurs in R. A. Webb, “The Evolution Controversy,” in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 231-84. Ernest Trice Thompson notes Girardeau's distaste for evolutionary thought in *Presbyterians in the South, Volume 2: 1861-1890* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1973), 464.

¹¹ Thomas H. Law, “Pastorate after the War,” in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 138.

pulpit without Scriptural mandate.¹² Though confining his preaching to Scripture alone, Girardeau did not tarry merely over his pet favorite portion of Scriptures, but, according to the same admirer, he proclaimed faithfully the whole counsel of God: “He was very plain in preaching, not blinking to discuss sin, judgment and hell, declaring, as Paul did to the Ephesians, the whole counsel of God and keeping back nothing that was profitable to his people.”¹³ Doubtless, then, Girardeau held the Spirit-given conviction that Scripture is God’s Word, and he predicated both his pulpit practice and his mature theological conclusions upon this bedrock conviction.

The Ample Evidences of Unction upon Girardeau’s Preaching

Second, and perhaps chief among the evidences of the Holy Spirit’s power and presence in Girardeau’s preaching, is the work that the Holy Spirit performed upon the preacher himself. Kelly, in his work *Preachers with Power: Four Stalwarts of the South*, subtitled his extended unit on Girardeau “Unction at Work.”¹⁴ In that unit Kelly cites E. M. Bounds for an extended comment upon unction:

. . . [it is] the indefinable in preaching which makes it preaching . . . that which distinguishes and separates preaching from all mere human address . . . unction is that indefinable, indescribable something which an old, renowned Scottish preacher described thus: ‘There is sometimes somewhat in preaching that cannot be described either to matter or expression, and cannot be described what it is, or from whence it cometh, but with a sweet violence it pierceth into the heart and affections and comes immediately from the Lord; but if there be any way to obtain such a thing it is by the heavenly disposition of the speaker.’

. . . Unction . . . inspires and clarifies his intellect, gives insight and grasp and projecting power; which is greater than head power; and tenderness, purity, force

¹² From Girardeau, “The Nature of Prayer,” in Blackburn, ed., *Sermons*, 256-57.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kelly, 119-70.

flow from the heart by it. Enlargement, freedom, fullness of thought, directness and simplicity of utterance are the fruits of this unction.¹⁵

The fruits which Bounds lists that occur in Girardeau's preaching ministry shall become evident in due time. The disposition that Bounds cites as requisite to unction now comes under treatment.

R. L. Dabney, contemporary and friend of Girardeau, notes an indispensable quality for the sacred orator: sincere, eminent piety.¹⁶ Testimony abounds copiously for this element in Girardeau's person and preaching. Benjamin Morgan Palmer, condoling with Girardeau's widow by letter, notes of him among other sterling qualities, "Better than all, his fervent piety and deep religious experience, gave a holy sanction to all his public teaching."¹⁷ Another writes that this deep, fervent perhaps ranked as Girardeau's cardinal trait, certainly not a bad cardinal trait to possess.¹⁸

R. A. Webb elaborates further upon Girardeau's walk with his Lord:

Dr. Girardeau was first of all a *Christian*. His piety was intellectual, bottoming itself upon the profound and steady convictions of his great mind. It was fervent, drawing upon all the strong emotions of his sensitive heart. It was ethical, involving his conscience in the deepest sense of sin, and making duty stand above him as an imperial master. It laid its hand upon his will, carrying him fearlessly to his tasks, and into controversies which were painful to his spirit. He was above all a devout man.¹⁹

¹⁵ E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, n. d.), 68-69, quoted in Kelly, 168 (Ellipses belong to Kelly).

¹⁶ R. L. Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric* (1870, reprint edition, Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1999, and retitled *Evangelical Eloquence: A Course of Lectures on Preaching*), 40, quoted in Kelly, 167.

¹⁷ Letter of July 5, 1898, to Mrs. Girardeau from Benjamin Morgan Palmer, quoted in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 391, and also quoted in Kelly, 142.

¹⁸ W. T. Hall, "Introduction," to *Sermons*, 11.

¹⁹ R. A. Webb, "The Presbyterian," in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 208.

George Blackburn, the aforementioned son-in-law of Girardeau, in his reciting of Girardeau's personal devotional practice, accounts for Girardeau's outwardly holy life and powerful preaching:

He spent much time over the open pages of the words of truth, he was often on his knees in midnight vigils, and sometimes the whole night was spent in unbroken prayer—God heard him and dwelt with him, thus he became ‘a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,’ and one who spoke out of the deep experiences of a heart that felt the love of God shed abroad in it.²⁰

No doubt Girardeau possessed unusual devotion to Christ—exemplary within a generally pious Southern Presbyterian Church of his day—and his contemporaries readily and warmly own the fact.

Girardeau's commitment to personal devotion led him to emphasize public prostration in prayer within his churches. This occurred both systematically and occasionally in the Zion Presbyterian Church erected for the slave population of Charleston.²¹ The church held a weekly prayer meeting, and attendance with resultant power grew steadily during Girardeau's ministry there. A special prayer meeting gathered just before the revival season of 1858. Several in the church urged Girardeau to proceed to preach without the divine release for the same, but he would not consent and tarried for the outpouring of the Spirit. God honored this tarrying, as the following narrative clearly shows:

One evening, while leading the people in prayer, he received a sensation as if a bolt of electricity had struck his head and diffused itself through his whole body. For a little while he stood speechless under the strange physical feeling. Then he said: ‘The Holy Spirit has come; we will begin preaching tomorrow evening.’ He closed the service with a hymn, dismissed the congregation, and came down from the pulpit; but no one had left the house. The whole congregation had quietly resumed its seat.

²⁰ Blackburn, “The Man,” in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 371.

²¹ For the ensuing I stand indebted to Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 37, 89, 98-99.

Instantly he realized the situation. The Holy Spirit had not only come to him—He had also taken possession of the hearts of the people . . . The meeting went on night and day for eight weeks. Large numbers of both white and black were converted and joined the various churches of the city. His own was wonderfully built up, not only in numbers, but also in an experience that remained in the church.”²²

It pleased God through the Holy Spirit to spur Girardeau to devotional exercise and evident piety, and it pleased Him to work through Girardeau to cultivate a similar stance in his hearers. The effect of the Holy Spirit on the empowered Girardeau’s pulpit work we examine now, and afterward we see the effects upon his hearers.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit in Girardeau’s Sermon Delivery

Next, the Holy Spirit heightened Girardeau’s natural faculties and gave him supernatural empowerment at delivery. Testimony abounds to the great natural faculties that God either gave directly to Girardeau or enabled him to develop, and several note their presence and effect for good. Thomas A. Law relates at length his impressions of Girardeau as a preacher:

He was a man of superb physique, tall (about five feet ten or eleven inches), rather slender at the time, though he grew stouter as age advanced; muscular, agile, and with fine use of his body in every way. And in the pulpit his action was energetic, graceful and exceedingly impressive—a gesture often thrilling the hearer. His voice was keen and penetrating, but, at the same time, smooth and musical. His mind was quick and logical, with well trained faculties and strongly disposed to reading and study. His taste was poetic—he often composed beautiful hymns—his imagination vivid, and his descriptive powers wonderful. His temperament was ardent and his emotions strong. His demeanor in the pulpit was dignified, grave and earnest, indicating that he fully realized his responsibility as an ambassador of Christ and a minister to dying men. I can never forget the solemn countenance he carried into the pulpit and the earnestness with which he read the hymns and conducted the services. And he threw his whole self, body, mind, and spirit, into his preaching, speaking with a fervor such as I have

²² Blackburn, “Work Among the Negroes, Part III” in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 99-100, quoted in Kelly, 134 (ellipsis belongs to Kelly).

rarely seen equalled in the pulpit, and which deeply impressed his hearers with his zeal for God and for their souls.²³

Similarly, Girardeau's son-in-law notes:

His figure was tall, straight, well-proportioned and athletic; his movements were easy and graceful; his face was strong, and his blue eyes could beam with love or flash with fire as occasion required; his voice was full, rich and sweet; it was said that when preaching in the early days of his ministry, it sounded like the notes of a flute; it certainly had wonderful compass; he could make it imitate the lapping of the water on the beach, the roll of distant thunder, or anything else for which his high-wrought and splendid rhetoric called; his gestures, always made unconsciously, were strong and impressive and exactly suited to impress the thought that he wished to convey.²⁴

It may appear from the foregoing that these abilities, varied and profound though they be, come chiefly from human means to be applied to human ends. This assuredly is not the case. Note the 1898 testimony of a member of Charleston's Glebe Street Presbyterian Church, where Girardeau was pastor for ten years in the immediate postbellum period:

As a preacher Dr. Girardeau was *sui generis*. His style was his own, and what that style was those who heard him in his prime can testify. The most abstract discussion, under the fire of his earnestness and desire to convince, became luminous. Hence he was never dull. His application and peroration were often masterpieces of impassioned eloquence. All his gifts of oratory, all the stores of learning he had treasured up in his well disciplined mind he laid as a tribute at his Master's feet. The pathos, the tender appeal, the solemn warning, the tone of voice, the graceful gesture, the eye, now flashing with the fervor of his thought, now melting into tenderness—these are simply indescribable.²⁵

Note again a single sentence from within the above extended citation: "All his gifts of oratory, all the stores of learning he had treasured up in his well disciplined mind he laid as a tribute at his Master's feet." Granted, Girardeau expended great effort to cultivate his mind, heart, and soul before Christ—and, hence, none may presume upon the Spirit's

²³ Thomas H. Law, "Pastorate after the War," in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 137, quoted in Kelly, 146.

²⁴ Blackburn, "The Man," in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 366.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 389, quoted in Kelly, 145-46. The member who offered these remarks remains unidentified.

empowerment to the neglect of sanctified labor before Him—but these gifts Girardeau lay again at His Lord’s feet for His disposal through him. One scholar offers that, above all, Girardeau’s experience of the Holy Spirit when preaching gave him such powers of ready expression—and this fact sits on full display in the extant literature.²⁶

George Blackburn confirms the divine origin and leadership of Girardeau’s pulpit gifts: “His Maker had endowed him with splendid gifts, and Grace had added to them rare virtues.”²⁷ Blackburn proceeds to note the prodigious faculties in Girardeau which the Lord hallowed to his use: among them his figure, eyes, gestures, bearing, intellect, emotions, imagination, taste, judgment, magnetism, preparation, language, illustrations and his love and sympathy for all. At the end, however, Blackburn asserts that these do not fundamentally account for Girardeau’s power in the pulpit. From whence does the power come? It comes from the close walk with God that in turn pleased Him to empower his servant of choice.²⁸

The Evidence of Changed Lives through Girardeau’s Preaching

Finally, ample evidence exists that the Holy Spirit changed lives for their eternal good and for His own glory through Girardeau’s preaching. It comes as no surprise that Girardeau, whose free emotional expression God’s sanctified for His use in the pulpit, moved many in God’s providence to emotional expression. The account of J. M. Buckley, a Northern Methodist scholar, is typical of many accounts of Girardeau’s

²⁶ Kelly, 161.

²⁷ Ibid., 370.

²⁸ Ibid., 371.

preaching. Here is Buckley's remark upon hearing Girardeau at Second (now Arsenal Hill) Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina:

I have now to say that, having heard Thomas Guthrie of Edinburgh, James Hamilton of London, and Mr. Spurgeon six or eight times, it has never fallen to my lot to hear a more absorbing spiritual, eloquent and moving sermon on an ordinary occasion. It made all the preaching I have ever done, and nearly all I have ever heard seem like mere sermonizing. Looking around to catch the eye of my friend, I saw that two-thirds of all the men in the audience were in tears. It was no rant or artificial excitement or mere pathos, but *thought* burning and glowing. None but a man of equal intellect, learning, piety and eloquence could preach such a discourse without notes.²⁹

Another sermon that elicited great emotional outpouring occurred in Columbia's First Presbyterian Church at the behest of the South Carolina State Legislature. R. A. Webb narrates:

It was an hour and a half long. Attention was tense from the first. But when the flute-like voice rose to its best, reinforced by the silent language of gesture and face, many of the hearers stretched themselves forward as far as they could reach. Tears poured down cheeks and spittle fell from relaxed mouths. When the preacher's voice hushed the multitude fell back into position with an audible heave, which sounded as if it had come simultaneously from every breast.³⁰

A third account of emotional vent at Girardeau's preaching—perhaps even more poignant than the others, occurred early in his ministry when he preached to his large congregation at Zion Presbyterian Church in Charleston:

As in plaintive tones he pictured Jesus Christ going forth to death and bending beneath the burden of the cross, every eye was opened wide and riveted upon the speaker, while each breast seemed to rise and fall, as step after step was taken up the rugged steep of Calvary. When the place of execution was reached everybody fell back and many hands were raised in horror. When the nails were driven a deep sigh swept through the house like the sad moan of the sea as it rolls in upon the shore, and

²⁹ Dr. J. M. Buckley, quoted in J. B. Mack, "Work Among the Negroes, Part II," in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 57, quoted in Kelly, 143.

³⁰ R. A. Webb, "The Presbyter," in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 209, quoted in Kelly, 145. The sermon preached on that occasion, "The Last Judgment," enjoys reprint in Blackburn, ed., *Sermons*, 13-38.

when the Saviour's head was drooped in death a deep shudder convulsed the weeping throng as hundreds piteously cried, 'O, my God! O, my God!'³¹

No matter whether enslaved or free, and no matter whether exalted in attainments and position or not, the preaching of Girardeau had by God's providence great effect upon the emotions. Now we turn to see the effects of that preaching upon the souls and wills of Girardeau's hearers. That preaching not only moved eyes to tears, but also God used it to move souls into the Kingdom and to move wills to decisive, Spirit-led action.

Just before the outbreak of the Civil War, General Benjamin F. Butler of Massachusetts and Colonel Alfred Robb of middle Tennessee—later opponents in the ensuing sectional conflict—together attended worship at Girardeau's Charleston church while otherwise attending the national convention of the Democratic Party. Colonel Robb narrates his account of that day:

The sermon was tender and spiritual, and though profound, was plain, delivered with fire and unction. After the preacher took his seat, deeply impressed, I was with closed eyes meditating on the wonderful sermon, when I heard someone sobbing. Looking around I saw General Butler's face bathed in tears. Just then the church officers came for the usual collection and at once General Butler drew from his pockets both hands full of silver coin . . . and cast it into the basket, with the audible remark, 'Well, I have never heard such a man and have never heard such a sermon.'³²

J. B. Mack concludes the account of Colonel Robb with the notation that within two years of that day Colonel Robb had died upon the battlefield, that Girardeau had left Charleston for service as a Confederate chaplain, and that General Butler was hated by the men and women of Dixie.³³ Yet on that day God not only moved General Butler

³¹ J. B. Mack, in "Work Among the Negroes, Part II," in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 52-53.

³² J. B. Mack, "Work Among the Negroes, Part II," in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 57-58, quoted in Kelly, 144-45.

³³ *Ibid.*, 58.

emotionally to tears, but also to commendable generosity of funds—presumably to assist the advance of Girardeau’s ministry.

A similar prompting to generous giving occurred on another occasion of Girardeau’s Spirit-empowered preaching. In 1881, Girardeau, then a Columbia Seminary professor, preached a sermon on the ascension of Christ at the semi-centennial celebration of his Seminary. Among his hearers that day were Joseph Mack, W. A. Wood of Statesville, North Carolina, and James H. Thornwell Jr. (the son of the great antebellum Southern Presbyterian pastor and professor) of Fort Mill, South Carolina. Joseph Mack records that after the sermon, J. H. Thornwell Jr. added, with trembling voice, “Put me down for \$100.00 to the endowment of the Seminary as a thank offering for the privilege of hearing that sermon. It is worth ten times that much to me in my work, but that is all I have to give.”³⁴ God generously gave of Himself to a man through Girardeau’s anointed preaching, and that man in turn gave of himself sacrificially to Columbia Seminary for the blessing of faculty, students, and ultimately the Southern Presbyterian Church.

Not only did God move wills to decisive action through Girardeau’s preaching, but He also used that preaching to gather souls into the Kingdom of His Son. One such occasion occurred at the end of the Civil War, while Girardeau languished as a prisoner of war. Even while incarcerated Girardeau preached—and that often—within his prison. It was noted, “When Dr. Girardeau preached, not only the circle, but the streets as far as he could be heard, were crowded with eager listeners. Confederates and Federal guards

³⁴ J. B. Mack, “Work Among the Negroes, Part II,” in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 55, quoted in Kelly, 144.

all mingled together, held by a common interest . . . Many men dated their conversion from these services.”³⁵

A few years later Girardeau assisted with a series of meetings in the Whippy Swamp area away from the coast in the South Carolina backcountry. Joseph Mack had the privilege of preaching one night, but on that night he perceived that, in his words, “I realized my utter inability to fully meet the eternal issues of the hour.”³⁶ He made appeal to Girardeau, who sat with him in the pulpit, “Can you not tell these perishing sinners of our precious Savior?”³⁷ The following is Mack’s narrative:

At once [Girardeau] was on his feet. In a voice tremulous with emotion he tenderly told them of their critical, their very critical condition because of the presence of God’s Holy Spirit, and pointed to Christ as a refuge, an entirely safe refuge. Then his voice changed—the subdued manner was gone—the tremulous tone disappeared. In accents of exultation he proclaimed a divinely glorious Saviour. As the fires of Christian triumph flashed from his eyes and flamed forth in his words the hearts of all God’s people were kindled with the joy of His salvation, and tears of gratitude coursed down every cheek.

Just then, in a voice loud and thrilling, he cried, ‘O sinners, dear, dying sinners, this is our Saviour. Come to Him just as your are. Come to Him right now.’ In an instant every impenitent person in the house (with a single exception) rose up and rushed forward to the foot of the pulpit. Some outside dashed through the doors and one or two sprang through the windows to reach the same place . . . In God’s glorious heaven angels were singing and saying, ‘He has saved *them*.’ In the rude country church sinners were singing and saying, ‘He has saved *me*.’”³⁸

Only God through His Holy Spirit changes lives, and we see the evidence of changed lives as a result of Girardeau’s preaching ministry—changes of position from outside the Kingdom of Christ to inside it and changes of action consonant with Scripture’s teaching.

³⁵ D. W. McLaurin, “The Confederate Chaplain,” in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 126.

³⁶ J. B. Mack, “Work Among the Negroes, Part II,” in Blackburn, ed., *Life Work*, 53.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 53-54, quoted in Kelly, 154.

We now see, upon the whole, the pervasive, profound influence of the Holy Spirit in the preaching ministry of John L. Girardeau. Girardeau himself welcomed the Spirit's ministry within his preaching ministry, as evidenced in this last word from Girardeau himself, "I would earnestly invoke the influence of the Holy Spirit to impress upon every heart the truth which may be spoken."³⁹

³⁹ From "The Last Judgment," in *Sermons*, 13.

CHAPTER SIX: THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE PREACHING MINISTRY OF BENJAMIN MORGAN PALMER (1818-1902)

Biography in brief

Benjamin Morgan Palmer, the fourth and longest-lived exemplar under study in this thesis-project, was born on January 25, 1818, in Charleston, South Carolina, into a line of distinguished ministers of the Gospel.¹ He grew to his maturity both in that city and afterward at nearby Walterboro, a town roughly *en route* to Savannah, Georgia. At the age of fourteen Palmer removed from his beloved South for collegiate studies at Amherst College in Massachusetts. After two years of study in New England he found himself expelled from Amherst because of his unwillingness to divulge to the school officials the secrets of a secret society of Amherst students. Thomas A. Hoyt reports that upon this turn, “The faculty offered to take him back, but owing to the irritation he had suffered at the hands of the critics of his State and section and to his dislike of the spirit of the college . . . he was determined to leave the institution and to return to his own people.”² He returned to an unsympathetic father, himself a recipient of a New England theological education at Andover Seminary, and the breach lay open between the two for several years.

After Palmer’s return from New England he became the schoolteacher for a season in the village school at McPhersonville, South Carolina. Then Palmer felt himself

¹ For the ensuing biographical material about Palmer I stand indebted to Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee on Publication, 1906); Douglas F. Kelly, *Preachers with Power: Four Stalwarts of the South* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1992); Joe Morecraft III, “Biographical Introduction to Palmer’s Sermons,” in Palmer, *Sermons of B. M. Palmer, Volumes I and II* (New Orleans: Clark & Hofeline, 1875, 1876; one-volume reprint Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2002); John Miller Wells, *Southern Presbyterian Worthies* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee on Publication, 1936).

² Wells, 142.

badly treated by Christian people, and this sentiment made him resistant to the Gospel message. He remarked upon this time in his life, “I was irreligious, nay, worse than that I was hostile to religion, in decided hostility to God and the Gospel, in such evil posture that, had I fallen into the hands of scoffers I might have become as infidel as they.”³ Into this situation God’s merciful hands moved, through the instrumentality of a loving challenge from his cousin, to draw Palmer to himself. Thus, at eighteen Palmer knew himself alive and safe in Christ—a knowledge never to be shaken through the passage of many years.⁴

In January 1837, Palmer renewed his collegiate studies, this time at The University of Georgia in Athens. These studies, and his company,⁵ proved much more amiable, and he concluded study there at the top of his class after the summer session of 1838. Like many before him, after completing study at The University of Georgia Palmer considered the study of law as a profession before being claimed by God for the study of divinity. Hence, Palmer returned to his native state to study in Columbia Seminary.

In just over two years Palmer completed his ministerial training and received licensure to preach the Gospel from Charleston Presbytery. In Columbia, Palmer became acquainted with and later deeply appreciative of James Henley Thornwell, then professor in South Carolina College (later The University of South Carolina) and afterward pastor

³ Ibid., 143, quoted in Kelly, 89.

⁴ Palmer writes of this sure knowledge, “[Peace with God] came to stay, and through five and fifty years it has deepened in the soul to which it came as the balm of heaven” (Wells, 143).

⁵ See Johnson, 59-60, for a partial account of Palmer’s relations in Athens. While enrolled at Georgia, Palmer served as tutor in two of the early leading families in Athens: first in the home of Oliver Prince, and later in the home of Thomas Wiley Baxter. The Baxter children were Palmer’s lifelong friends. Both the Prince and Baxter families have major streets named for them in Athens today.

of Columbia's First Presbyterian Church. The two became firm friends and co-laborers in the Gospel, and in his mature years Palmer would write the definitive biography of Thornwell. Also at Columbia Palmer met his wife, Miss Augusta McConnell, the stepdaughter of George Howe, a professor of his in the Seminary. The two married, after some opposition, in October 1841, with the marriage solemnized by Howe himself.

Palmer made successful trial of his gifts in a brief supply pastorate in Anderson, South Carolina (in that state's Upstate section), before removing with his new bride to Savannah to assume the pastorate of that city's First Presbyterian Church. In this service the Presbytery of Georgia, then the only presbytery in Georgia, ordained Palmer to the ministry in March 1842.⁶ He remained there for less than two years before answering the call of Columbia's First Presbyterian Church to succeed J. H. Thornwell as pastor.

At the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, Palmer's reputation as a preacher began to grow within the Southern Presbyterian fold. At the end of Palmer's pastorate the church had ninety percent more members than at its outset, and many leading citizens of South Carolina heard his preaching regularly. During this period several house organs began to form within the southern portion of American Presbyterianism, and Palmer *via* his pen earned further honors as a writer of singular organization and eloquence. When he left First Presbyterian Church to teach ecclesiastical history in Columbia Seminary, he stood in his mid-thirties as a leader among the Southern Presbyterians. After two years in the Seminary, however, he returned to his first love—the pastorate—and answered one final pastoral call in the affirmative. For over forty-five years B. M. Palmer would serve as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁶ Johnson, 79.

Palmer's reputation to the wider world grew from the earliest days of his New Orleans pastorate. He preached, contrary to the usual Southern Presbyterian practice of the day, upon a political question—and that sermon, the Thanksgiving Day address of 1860, likely led Louisiana, as well as other states, into secession and later the Confederacy. He served as pastor *in absentia* when New Orleans fell into Federal hands in 1862. After the war Palmer returned to New Orleans and found himself a means of God's restoring a chastened people in what then was termed the American Southwest.

His services of pastoral care, especially during yellow fever epidemics, won him the hearts not only of First Presbyterian Church, but also those of New Orleans. He won the hearts of Jews in New Orleans and elsewhere for his strong, repeated speeches against the pogroms ordered by czarist Russia against its Jewish population in 1882. His stances for Christian truth in the political sphere, though always delivered as a private citizen and not as a minister of the Gospel, won him wide acclaim.⁷ As Palmer advanced in years, he slowly but surely grew to be the first citizen of New Orleans.⁸

For all these garlands obtained, Palmer knew more than the usual share of grief—even considering the multiplied griefs common in his day. He with his wife fathered six children, a firstborn son and afterward five daughters, but only one daughter survived him. Palmer's wife died in 1888, and this blow fell upon him the hardest of all. He dated his own decline from his peak powers from this event, for his health began to fail not long afterward. However, God used these multiplied griefs and illnesses to make Palmer

⁷ Among these were denunciations of the Federal regime during Reconstruction and political corruption in New Orleans and throughout Louisiana—particularly in the matter of the lottery that outside interests would foist upon the people of Louisiana.

⁸ Kelly, 103.

an especially compassionate and tender pastor. A work from his pen during this time, *The Broken Home, or Lessons in Sorrow*, remains a classic pastoral tome to hearts broken over a home broken by death. Yet out of his pain Palmer affirmed the goodness of God in the removal of each of his departed loved ones. He knew them to be in Heaven, and this gave him great consolation. He looked forward to his own reunion with his loved ones already with the Lord in Heaven.

That reunion God deferred into the early years of the past century. In early May 1902, likely due to failing eyesight, Palmer stepped into the path of a street car and suffered injuries from which he would not recover upon this plane. Hence, on May 27, 1902, God called B. M. Palmer to Heaven at the age of eighty-four. The whole city mourned the loss of their great pastor and citizen. In a fitting tribute, the humble flowers offered by the driver of the street car that struck Palmer occupied a prominent place in the funeral display.⁹

Thus ended the sixty-one-year ministry of Benjamin Morgan Palmer in the flesh. He continues, according to God's pleasure, to speak to this day—for many of his writings remain in print. This chapter now turns to note the source of this fruitful and beloved ministry.

The Holy Spirit's Involvement in Palmer's Sermon Preparation

As is true of the other exemplars under study, Palmer held the fundamental conviction that Scripture is not essentially the word of man, or of men, but rather the Word of God. The biographer and protégé of R. L. Dabney, Thomas Cary Johnson,

⁹ Johnson, 628.

wrote in his subsequent biography of B. M. Palmer, “He had studied the evidences of [Scripture] being the word of God; had deliberately made up his mind that they were valid, and that the Bible is the word of God; had set that down as a fixed fact in his creed. He gave himself to preaching that word.”¹⁰ From Palmer’s own lips and pen we have this testimony concerning the finality of the Gospel message: “We need no other revelations, since we have the utterance of God’s own thoughts, through the speech of His own Son and by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.”¹¹ Therefore, as Douglas Kelly notes, a telling fact of Palmer’s preaching was that total commitment to the Word of God characterized his life and preaching.¹²

Not only did Palmer stand squarely within his theological and ecclesiastical tradition in affirming that Scripture is the Word of God written, ultimately inspired by God the Holy Spirit, but he also affirmed the necessity of the Spirit’s illumination of Scripture as a prerequisite to spiritual benefit from it.¹³ Palmer, alluding to John 14:26, asserted that the Holy Spirit reveals Christ in the Word, bringing all things to our remembrance whatsoever He has said to us.¹⁴ The Spirit does this, Palmer asserted, by, “lighting up the Scriptures to us with the glory which beams from the Savior’s person and glory above.”¹⁵

¹⁰ Johnson, 660.

¹¹ From the sermon entitled “The Sealing of the Spirit,” based upon Ephesians 1:13 and recorded in Palmer, *Sermons, Volume I*, 273.

¹² Kelly, 116.

¹³ This twofold ministry of the Holy Spirit regarding Scripture, i.e., inspiration and illumination, Dr. Palmer treats ably in his sermon, “The Other Comforter,” based upon John 14:16 and recorded in his *Sermons, Volume I*, 208-09.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Palmer noted the power and pleasure of this illumination of Scripture by the Holy Spirit in soaring terms: “How often are those blessed pages dark to us, as we read them in the closet! until, as we lift up the heart in the prayer, ‘In thy light let us see light,’ a sudden glory fills every letter and word, and the light of heaven itself seems to break in upon the soul!”¹⁶ Palmer, after illustrating this truth, summarized it afresh in similar rhapsodic terms: “Just so we toil over the text of the Bible, with our cold grammatical construction of its verbal propositions, until in an instant the Spirit of God floods the page with a celestial light, and the promise throbs with the very accents of the Savior’s living voice.”¹⁷ Thus the Holy Spirit receives His rightful glory as the One Who inspires and illumines Scripture to elect souls, as Palmer himself affirmed, “Thus, in a double way, by inspiration and illumination, does the Holy Ghost carry forward the prophetic office of Jesus Christ, and become the *other* Comforter.”¹⁸

Palmer never sensed that this double work of the Holy Spirit touching Scripture and its benefit in the believer’s life absolved him of prodigious labor in preparing his sermons. Kelly remarks upon Palmer’s commendable work in the study:

Besides the hard work of long thinking, Palmer carefully and painfully interacted with the biblical text in the original language (at least that is the case with the Greek), not forgetting to pay attention to the historical and grammatical context of each passage. He specifically dealt with Greek grammar in various places, and mentions the importance of proper exegesis. He is also very competent at dealing with the larger and smaller context.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Kelly, 116-17. Kelly leads us to Palmer’s sermons for evidence. For evidence of Palmer’s discharge of proper exegesis, see *Sermons, Volume I*, 265. For evidence of Palmer’s use of the Greek New Testament, see *Sermons, Volume I*, 271, 385. For evidence of Palmer’s note of a larger Scriptural context see his opening paragraph in his sermon “Victory over Trials” (*Sermons, Volume I*, 303).

Alas, there appears in the extant literature no explicit mention of how Palmer welcomed the Spirit in his study. Though this be the case, Palmer likely appropriated for himself all that he taught regarding the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Palmer gave himself to careful thinking and study, yet he realized that these alone would not suffice without the operation of the Spirit to reveal the things of Christ *to* him—in order that the Spirit may reveal the things of Christ *through* him to his hearers.

The Degree of Unction upon Palmer's Preaching Ministry

We now consider the Holy Spirit's bestowment of unction upon B. M. Palmer. Again, the phenomenon we call *unction* may be more easily described than defined, but much of it has to do with what the Holy Spirit does with the preacher alone in the secret place prior to public proclamation. As with the other exemplars, there exists ample evidence of a robust measure of unction upon Palmer's ministry.

Again we note, as with the other exemplars, that Christian piety in the preacher stands prerequisite to the Spirit's gracious gift of unction. By nurturing a deep devotion to Christ, Palmer exhibited this necessary prerequisite to unction. Joe Morecraft rightly makes much of this in his biographical introduction to the 2002 reprint of Palmer's sermons. This devotion came to fullest earthly fruition upon his deathbed, where his final discernible statement, "Jesus, Saviour,"²⁰ distills over sixty-five years of life and ministry in Christ to a final glorious earthly confession. After Palmer's protracted struggle for assurance of his salvation, doubtless Christ's love for him and atoning work on his behalf appeared priceless to him. Accordingly, Palmer's life and ministry rested upon his

²⁰ Morecraft, in *Sermons*, ix., and Johnson, 624.

Savior. Morecraft notes more fully of Palmer that, “His entire life was a *looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith*. Christ was for him the *sublime exemplar* of our faith, the *immediate object* on which our faith rests, and the *source* from which our faith comes.”²¹ Hence, Thomas Cary Johnson notes that Palmer desired to glorify God and enjoy Him forever in all that he did.²² Johnson gives further explicit testimony to Palmer’s pious character:

But when we consider his ethical and religious character, his freedom from petty vanities, his Christ-like humility, his transparent simplicity, honesty and honor, his broad and intense love for his fellow men, regardless of race or condition, his noble devotion to God. . .we unhesitatingly rank him as the peer of the great uninspired preachers and defenders of the faith of the ages.²³

Palmer also displayed great dependence upon God in his life and preaching ministry. Of the admirable Spirit-engendered qualities that Johnson lists, one stands for the purpose of this thesis-project for special attention, namely, that Palmer walked with great humility before his God. Palmer recognized himself insufficient for the task of declaring God’s counsel to His people, and therefore readily leaned upon Another for support. Morecraft, in tribute to Palmer’s humility, notes Palmer’s sentiments about himself in a letter to a dear friend upon the death of his daughter: “I am nothing on earth but a poor, wretched sinner, with only God’s rich, free, sovereign grace betwixt him and the hell he deserves. If you knew me as I know myself, you would see more than reason for all the blows, and for blows a thousand fold heavier than have fallen upon me.”²⁴

²¹ Morecraft, *ibid*.

²² Johnson, 676. The allusion to glorifying God and enjoying Him forever is the answer to the first question in The Westminster Shorter Catechism.

²³ *Ibid*. When Johnson refers to Palmer as *uninspired*, presumably he means one not summoned by God to pen His Word directly. Any other reference to Palmer as *uninspired* must be discarded.

²⁴ Johnson, 518-59, quotes in Morecraft, *Sermons*, xi.

Palmer, thus abasing himself before God's greatness, abased his abilities unsanctified before the God Who sanctified Palmer's abilities for His service. In his inaugural sermon at First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, Palmer developed his text along two lines: first, that true ministers of the Gospel, both in their calls to vocation and to location, derive these calls from God alone, and second, that all true ministerial ability comes from God.²⁵ Upon this discharge of duty, then, the minister must look for encouragement from God rather than from man.²⁶ From start to finish, then, Palmer saw the ministerial enterprise as foundationally the work of God—and this at an early point in his life and ministry. It comes as no surprise, then, that others rise in later years to commend the unction bestowed by the Holy Spirit upon B. M. Palmer—a man for all his gifts most humbly dependent upon God.²⁷

William Frost Bishop, while visiting in New Orleans, heard Palmer preach at First Presbyterian Church. He later wrote at length of his impressions, concluding with this high praise, "I have no words to tell you of the soaring thoughts which marked the close of Dr. Palmer's sermon, in which a comparison was instituted between philosophy and religion. There was the unction of Spurgeon with the eloquence of Beecher."²⁸ Joe Morecraft, recently published admirer of Palmer, entitled his introduction to the one-volume reprint of Palmer's sermons "Benjamin M. Palmer: A Cataract of Holy Fire"²⁹ Morecraft obtained this title from a admiring lengthy description of Palmer's oratorical

²⁵ Johnson, 89, quoted in Kelly, 91.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Wells, 159.

²⁸ William Frost Bishop, in the *St. Louis Presbyterian*, February 11, 1885, quoted in Johnson, 425.

²⁹ Morecraft, in *Sermons*, vii.

gifts, fervent piety, and consecration to the Master.³⁰ To the outplay of this divine sanction that Palmer enjoyed, first in his preaching proper and afterward to his hearers' benefits, we now turn.

The Holy Spirit's Ministry in Palmer's Sermon Delivery

God blessed B. M. Palmer to a remarkable degree with so-called natural faculties for preaching. He had, by every account, a noteworthy facility with words—both in vast vocabulary and in timely use of that vocabulary to form crystalline images and propositions.³¹ Palmer also displayed great oratorical gifts and skill. His biographer, T. C. Johnson, remarks upon his oratorical prowess:

His organs of speech were his greatest physical endowments for the function of preaching. His voice was “wonderful,” indefinitely flexible and of great compass, adapting itself to the size of the audience room and the audience, always musical, even when thundering denunciations against sin and wrong, and often as sweet as a mother's lullaby. Apparently no description could do justice to this wonderful instrument. As he had the power by his choice of words, of calling up before the mind pictures, his own pictures of the things which he spoke, so he had the power of expressing every emotion in his voice.³²

In view of Palmer's own view, earlier established, of his own ministerial inability apart from God, the necessary inference presses forward with the weight of conclusion: these recognized abilities, though applied to a host of unsanctified uses, God sanctified in Palmer for His glory and the good of many.

³⁰ Johnson, 430. The whole description, originally published in the Louisville (Ky.) *Courier-Journal*, occurs at *ibid.*, 425-30. The lengthy soaring description was signed merely “M. B. H.”

³¹ See Johnson, 661, “He was a magician in the use of the English tongue. His vocabulary was vast and, in virtue of habit in use, was choice, pure, powerful, pictorial, vivid as life.

³² *Ibid.*, 663.

Evidence also exists for supernatural endowment of Palmer at delivery—endowment that cannot be explained in terms of human skill. The first of these supernatural endowments lies in Palmer’s unexpectedly short stature. A certain Texan who heard Palmer preach in New Orleans esteemed him thus: “Drawn by the reputation of his church, [he] was disappointed to find, as he supposed, a stranger of unprepossessing appearance in his pulpit, and was tempted to leave, but staying, was first struck by his reading, then by his prayer, and then, as he progressed in his sermon, he grew until he seemed to be a giant. He stayed over another Sunday and told his story to the doctor himself.”³³ As God did magnify Joshua in the sight of all Israel after the death of Moses (Josh 4:14), so also did God magnify the less than imposing physique of Palmer to seemingly towering stature.

A second evidence of God’s supernatural endowing of Palmer occurs late in his life. Perhaps this example ought not be called preaching, but, rather remarkably, an address to a general audience, on a political question. In 1890, Palmer delivered an address against the lottery in Louisiana. A distinguished rabbi wrote of the speech:

I have heard the foremost American public speakers, in the pulpit, or on the rostrum. Beecher commanded a more lurid rhetoric than Palmer. For a combination of logical argument and noble and brilliant rhetoric, neither he nor any other has equalled Palmer when *he* was at his best. I heard him that night in the Grand Opera house. Always except on this occasion, when listening to an address, even a great one, I have been able to say to myself, _____, how far do you agree with the speaker? What do you reject? How far will you go with him? Where will you stop? But I give you my word, sir, that night Dr. Palmer did not permit me to think for myself, nor to feel for myself, nor to will for myself, but picked me up and carried me whithersoever he would. It did not seem to me that it was Palmer that was speaking. He spoke as one inspired. It seemed to me that God Almighty was speaking through Palmer. He had filled Him with His Spirit and Message as He filled the Hebrew prophets of old.³⁴

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Johnson, 562, quoted partially in Wells, 178.

Thus the lottery fell to defeat in Louisiana, but more significantly for our purposes here, the Holy Spirit ushered forth so powerfully through Palmer to his hearers in the Opera House of New Orleans that even a leader espousing only the Old Covenant rose in testimony to the Power present in Palmer's proclamation. From this deliverance we turn to consider the powerful effects that the Holy Spirit worked through Palmer's preaching.

The Powerful Effects of Palmer's Preaching

We see in the foregoing narrative that the Holy Spirit moved people to decisive action through B. M. Palmer's deliverance of a so-called secular address. Other evidence lies at hand that the Spirit changed lives through Palmer's preaching. We tend to think of changed lives in terms of conversions. We think rightly when we think thus, and no doubt Palmer enjoyed his share of conversions over the course of a long preaching ministry. Yet Douglas Kelly asserts that, "undoubtedly the most distinctive attribute of Palmer's preaching in its encouraging nature."³⁵ This came experientially for Palmer; through many God-ordained adversities, he had tasted and seen that the Lord is good—and therefore received blessing upon his trust in his Lord (cf. Ps 34:8). From this deep experiential well God *via* the Holy Spirit spoke through Palmer to comfort and to encourage souls.

One such testimony rises indirectly from Eugene Daniel, pastor in 1902 of the Presbyterian church of Lewisburg, West Virginia. He writes of a changed life in an address delivered in B. M. Palmer's memory entitled *In Memoriam*:

³⁵ Kelly, 113.

By nature, by God's grace, by his own experience, he was made with a soul to feel another's woe. I remember well that an elder of the first church I ever served was in this city [New Orleans], and heard Dr. Palmer preach on Sunday after the preacher himself had been in sorrow. The subject was, "The Holy Spirit as the Comforter." Said this elder: "I was never so wrought upon in my life; the tension was so great that I felt positively sick when the exhaustion of reaction from my strained elevation came on." His power of pathos—for that it what it was, power—was plainly never sought by him or cultivated by him; it was just naturally and simply within him, and the ease with which he wielded it was nothing less than majestic.³⁶

Doubtless this unnamed Presbyterian elder averred the same all his life, and that man's Christian experience and ministry likely deepened considerably after hearing Palmer's Spirit-empowered preaching.

Among others who sought divine balm from their souls from Palmer was Jefferson Davis, the one-time president of the former Confederacy. His widow testifies:

About a year before my husband died he became very restless and announced his intention to go to New Orleans. We had several guests in the house and I suggested his waiting until Monday, but he said decidedly, 'I want to go today.' It was Saturday. He came back on Monday evening very calm and cheerful. In a day or two he said, 'I went to commune with Dr. Palmer, and it has done me a world of good' . . . Something had disquieted him greatly and he went to Dr. Palmer for comfort.³⁷

We are left to speculate why President Davis left his company in haste on a Saturday to see Palmer. It is not unreasonable to suppose, however, that Davis left his home in southwestern Mississippi in order to reach New Orleans in time to attend worship at that city's First Presbyterian Church under Palmer's preaching—and afterward to seek and to receive private pastoral counsel. Upon receiving these ministries from Palmer, Davis returned to Mississippi on Monday night much benefited. It is at least plausible, then, that the Spirit used Palmer's ministry in the pulpit and in the room of

³⁶ Eugene Daniel, *In Memoriam* (an address delivered November 16, 1902, at First Presbyterian Church, New Orleans, Louisiana), 10, quoted in Johnson, 664.

³⁷ Mrs. Jefferson Davis, quoted in Wells, 163, and Kelly, 115 (Ellipses belong to Wells).

counsel hand in glove to change for good the final year of the one-time Confederate president.

Palmer approached the height of his maturity and ability in the years immediately after the Civil War. From the foregoing it now seems evident that Palmer stood uniquely fitted and empowered by God to minister to a broken leading church in a broken leading city within a now-defunct Confederacy. T. C. Johnson titles the two chapters of Palmer's biography "Repairing the Broken Walls"—and in so doing he both evokes the image of Nehemiah rebuilding the walls of ancient Zion and implies that Palmer, among others, rebuilt the Southern Zion, to wit, the Presbyterian church in the former Confederate states.³⁸ Hearts and souls then in the South were broken by grief, desolation, the loss of nationhood, and to some extent the loss of a culture—however fallen the culture may have been in certain views. God made B. M. Palmer able and willing for the ministerial challenges before him.

An editorial appeared in the Monday, July 17, 1865, edition of the *New Orleans Times* noting Palmer's first appearance in his pulpit since the end of the Civil War. The writer noted that Palmer appeared chastened and subdued, and that he preached the same hope as ever, but in an humbler tone. Palmer alluded to the trials he endured over the preceding four years, and prayed that those trials be sanctified in his life to make him a more fit Gospel minister. As for what Palmer called the "dead past," he preferred to hide it away, in his words, in the solemn tomb, and henceforth no word should pass his lips except those meet for the servant of God in his courts.³⁹ This said, Palmer applied to his

³⁸ The chapters here cited occur in Johnson, 291-420.

³⁹ From the editorial of the *New Orleans Times*, Monday, July 17, 1865, quoted by Johnson, 292-93.

own life and calling what he would spend the next years applying to the lives and callings of others under his charge. In view of this time, Kelly writes, “One thinks of Palmer, especially in those post-war years, as administering grace and restoration to an entire generation through his preaching ministrations.”⁴⁰ Inasmuch as the Holy Spirit used Palmer specially to alter an unnamed ruling elder and a noteworthy Southern personage, so also the Spirit used Palmer more generally to alter almost two generations of First Presbyterians and visitors to New Orleans.

Benjamin Morgan Palmer in God’s providence did exceptionally well many tasks incumbent upon the pastorate. He wrote well and prodigiously—both for the presses and for the comfort of his private correspondents. He exercised the office of Christian citizen without peer. His massive intellectual attainments place him in lofty company with only a few others of his day. His pastoral visitation, especially in a large city, daunts even the most intrepid pastors of today. Yet his defining contribution to the church of his day, and to today’s Church, is his preaching ministry. He preached strictly from the Scriptures, with great humility and subsequent dependence upon God, with the mantle of divine favor upon him, with evident display of the Spirit and power in his preaching, and with evident fruit in lives subsequent to his deliveries. What true preacher, with proper vision of the tasks of ministry, would not want such a ministry? Such ministry—especially preaching, but also in other facets as well—comes from the Spirit only. To seek elsewhere for such power in preaching is vain.

⁴⁰ Kelly, 113.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY AND PROSPECT

Summary of the Thesis-Project

This thesis-project began with the sense that something is missing in contemporary preaching. A recovery of what is missing in sermon preparation and delivery would result in much greater good accomplished through preaching. What missing factor in preaching, if recovered, could effect this positive change? A conjecture formed—one that informed the subsequent research, namely, that sermon preparation and delivery fails to embrace sufficiently the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the enterprise.

An empirical survey of current homiletical literature, the results of which lie within this thesis-project's first chapter, confirmed the conjecture. With the exception of homiletics texts written from the Reformed and evangelical vantage point, homiletical literature today largely eschews the Holy Spirit in favor of the mastery of rhetorical techniques and ministry settings. This emphasis has diminished preaching at best and impoverished it at worst. A proper question then rose, namely, "Is there a way to recover the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in preaching, which, after all, is an activity ordained by God?"

The recovery began with a theological inquiry into the connection between the Holy Spirit and preaching. The inquiry, contained in this thesis-project's second chapter, revealed the necessity of the Holy Spirit at every stage of the preaching endeavor. In the study prior to preaching the Holy Spirit must grip the preacher afresh with the fact that the text to be proclaimed, though written by a human author, is the Word of God and not the mere word of man. The Holy Spirit must guide the preacher as exegete to the proper

text for the hearers, His intended meaning of the text, and His intended applications of the truth gleaned from the text: sometimes *via* the ordinary study processes and sometimes *via* special, divinely given insight into these matters. The ministry of the Holy Spirit continues from here into a cloister more solitary than the study.

The Holy Spirit must do something in the preacher's own self. The research revealed the necessity of the preacher's close walk with God before Spirit-empowered preaching will result. This divine "empowerment," a term which Greg Heisler substitutes for the more nebulous *anointing* and roughly equivalent to the older term *unction*,¹ assumes the preacher's eminent piety; little spiritual power accompanies preaching from preachers who do not enjoy close communion with God. Also, this divine empowerment will not come if the preacher trusts ordinary resources. Preachers who receive empowerment from on high know that such power must come from on high; it cannot come from within the preacher himself. This empowerment is the gift of the Holy Spirit, but His ministry in the preaching enterprise does not end here.

The Holy Spirit also works mightily in the public side of the preaching task. The Holy Spirit must empower faculties in the preacher considered natural, such as gestures and appropriate vocal variety (such as pitch, pace, pause, and punch, to name but a few). Also, the Spirit must give certain traits that defy definition, such as freedom in pulpit speech, love for God and love for hearers, that have little if any basis in anything natural. This supernatural endowment cannot be conjured within the preacher; it must come from God. Yet, in God's mercy this endowment does come—chiefly to those preachers who seek it and welcome it.

¹ See Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2007), 133-34.

Finally, the survey notes the necessity of the Holy Spirit after the preaching event to work life change in the hearers; among those changes are conversion, edification, and assurance. Certain speakers may carry hearers to their views for a time, but only God through His Holy Spirit can make the dead live, the defiled pure, and the scoffing both believe and embrace the Gospel. The Holy Spirit's ministry in preaching, therefore, cannot be reduced to a simple segment of the process, nor can He be considered a mere helpful touch to the whole. The Holy Spirit, ideally, is involved intimately at every step of the preaching endeavor, and the best preaching is that preaching which most closely approximates this ideal.

This thesis-project displayed exemplars of that preaching from the Reformed tradition. That tradition recalls its great theological forefather, John Calvin, who extolled the Holy Spirit in his preaching ministry. Calvin asserted concerning the Spirit's ministry in preaching,

It is certain that if we come to church we shall not hear only a mortal man speaking but we shall feel (even by His secret power) that God is speaking to our souls, that He is the teacher. He so touches us that the human voice enters into us and so profits us that we are refreshed and nourished by it. God calls us to Him as if He had His mouth open and we saw Him there in person.²

Steven J. Lawson summarizes Calvin's view succinctly, "This powerful ministry of the Spirit was the *sine qua non* of Calvin's expository ministry."³ It is no wonder, then, that those following in the theological footsteps of the Genevan Reformer should follow him in his view regarding the ministry of the Spirit in preaching. For this thesis-project, its

² Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (1562, reprint Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1998), 42, quoted in Steven J. Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, a division of Ligonier Ministries, 2007), 28.

³ Lawson, 28.

major sections examined four representative exemplars from the Reformed tradition in the American South in the nineteenth century in order to demonstrate the Holy Spirit's presence in sermon preparation and delivery. What did an examination of these exemplars reveal?

The four Southern Presbyterian exemplars here studied, Thornwell, Dabney, Girardeau, and Palmer, welcomed and displayed the Holy Spirit at every point of their preaching ministries. In the study these four men, among the most studious and learned men of their generations, employed their talents to discern what the Holy Spirit said through the text under study. Contemporaries lauded each man as an example of Christian piety, a piety prerequisite for the display of divine power in preaching. Testimonies proliferate of the effects of each man as he preached and after he concluded his message. God used the preaching of these four men to usher countless souls into His kingdom and to encourage many folks already among the redeemed.

It is true that each exemplar had stronger evidences in some areas of their preaching tasks when compared with other areas. Yet these four men, placed under close examination concerning their welcome and embrace of the Holy Spirit in their preaching ministries, pass the examination with flying colors. Even though the last survivor of them departed for Heaven over one hundred years ago, thanks to their published works their common testimony to the necessity of the Holy Spirit in preaching still speaks. Hence, this thesis-project, from cover to cover, urges a fresh embrace of the Holy Spirit in the tasks that together constitute preaching. Only by recovering the Holy Spirit in preaching will God obtain His rightful glory and hearers obtain their highest good in the enterprise.

Prospect: A Stimulus to Recover the Holy Spirit in Preaching

The nineteenth-century Southern Presbyterian Church embraced the Holy Spirit's ministry in its preaching. Much then-contemporary preaching (e.g., C. H. Spurgeon in London) and antecedent preaching (e.g., John Calvin in Geneva) embraced the Holy Spirit. Today we have a situation where preaching embraces communication strategy, especially the mastery of preaching techniques and cultural settings, to the virtual exclusion of the Holy Spirit's ministry—a lamentable situation indeed. Hence, hopefully this thesis-project may play a small role in the recovery of that which is lost: namely, the recovery of the Holy Spirit as the indispensable element in preaching.

How may that recovery occur? First, recovery may occur within the agencies that train preachers. Many who teach the craft of preaching will agree that we need a fresh embrace of the Holy Spirit in the preaching endeavor. Many of these teachers of preaching will concur with the points made in this thesis-project and in the comparatively few homiletics texts that urge the embrace of the Holy Spirit in preaching. They can make their agreement explicit and profitable by their seminary-level instruction about how to embrace the Holy Spirit in preaching. Perhaps as little as one class meeting devoted to the topic early in the term, plus reminders as important junctures throughout the course, may well change the face of American preaching for the better in due course.

The same can be said for those expert scholars and practitioners of preaching who lead our preaching conferences. Much of these conferences, as noted in chapter one of this thesis-project, concern themselves exclusively with the nuts-and-bolts of preaching without considering the necessary power Source behind it. Yet many who lead such

conferences will concur that true preaching cannot occur without welcoming the Holy Spirit into the enterprise, and therefore more workshops within these conferences about the Holy Spirit's role in preaching may contribute to more powerful and more fruitful preaching. These classroom lectures, workshops and conferences must benefit from an additional consideration, namely, that our leading teachers welcome and display the Holy Spirit's ministry in their own preaching. Much is said about incarnational ministry in our time; if leading preachers and teachers of preaching embody the Holy Spirit's ministry in their preaching, then other preachers surely will welcome the Holy Spirit into their preaching tasks more fully.

Those leaders in preaching need help from a critical source for the renewal of the Holy Spirit in preaching, namely, book publishers. Given that even Christian book publishers do not continue to publish unless they post an honest profit, and given the general paucity of books treating the Holy Spirit's role in preaching, a Christian book publisher may feel reticence about a publishing endeavor into the relative unknown. Yet if leading scholars and practitioners of preaching begin to teach and model the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in preaching, then there will be demand for more books on the topic from students of preaching. If sufficient demand arises for such books, then Christian book publishers may be less wary to publish them.

Second, recovery may occur within preaching in general. Many preachers will note that preaching generally, and perhaps their own preaching particularly, has relied exclusively for too long on communication strategies—helpful and welcome though they be—to the exclusion of the most needful factor: the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in preaching. Likely as preachers entertain the welcome of the Holy Spirit to their

sermon preparations and deliveries, they will find Him no mere option to their preaching. They likely will not rest content with soliciting the Spirit's aid only when acutely conscious of needing Him. They will see that the Holy Spirit works in preaching upon the preacher, the hearers, and the preaching act itself to work His righteous will—and therefore preachers will solicit His aid, often and fervently, at every preaching opportunity. As preachers solicit the aid of the Holy Spirit both in the several tasks that constitute preaching and in the molding of their lives into a form consonant with Biblical truth, a welcome event may well come: a powerful public preaching ministry demonstrating the Spirit's power magnificently.

Third, recovery hopefully will occur within my own preaching in particular. I have long held that the Spirit must be involved to a great degree in preaching. I come from this thesis-project even more convinced that true preaching cannot occur outside the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that I may now neglect the tools of exegesis and rhetoric. In fact, though I attend reasonably well to these weekly, I aim to work more ardently in these areas, for the Holy Spirit will not bless slipshod preparation. Conversely, He will honor thorough preparation.

Two needful qualities for divine empowerment, personal piety and dependence upon God, caught my attention for further reflection. I try my best to walk with God, both in private devotion and in outward conduct, in ways that honor Him. I own readily that I cannot preach, and that my hearers cannot hear preaching and respond appropriately, without the powerful aid of the Holy Spirit. Yet after this thesis-project I desire a closer walk with the Lord and a more full sense of my dependence upon God for

anything good in preaching. Therefore, my view concerning the role of the Holy Spirit has not changed after this thesis-project; rather, it has deepened.

Prospect: A Stimulus to Additional Research

Hopefully, the material submitted in this thesis-project will stimulate more research upon the Holy Spirit's needful power and presence in preaching. This research examined the activity of the Holy Spirit in the exegetical-homiletical enterprise within one denomination (Presbyterian, with its assumed Reformed theological orientation) in one geographic area (the American South) over a historical period (roughly the nineteenth century). Others, while maintaining the methodology and criteria established in chapter two of this thesis-project, could change the parameters for exemplars to be studied. The results both would confirm and, as necessary, would correct the data and conclusions here submitted.

This project design may be repeated within denominational faith traditions other than the Reformed tradition. For example, how did preachers in the traditions tracing their lineage to John Wesley (e.g., Methodist, Wesleyan, Holiness and Pentecostal groups) appropriate the Spirit's ministry in their preaching? To what degree is the Holy Spirit emphasized in the preaching of the Anglican/Episcopalian tradition? How does Baptist preaching embrace the ministry of the Holy Spirit? What evidences for the power and presence of the Holy Spirit exist within Restorationist preaching (i.e., within the Disciples of Christ, the Christian churches, or the Church of Christ)? Changing this single parameter, namely, theological tradition or denomination, may yield different data—but, hopefully, lead to the same conclusion. We must recover the ministry of the Holy Spirit in contemporary preaching.

This thesis-project considered a single geographic area: the American South. How might the results differ when another geographical area comes under consideration? For example, what evidence exists for the appropriation of the Holy Spirit in the preaching prevalent in New England? How does preaching along the American West Coast embrace the ministry of the Holy Spirit within it? We need not rest content to remain upon American soil for the survey. For example, how has preaching within continental Europe manifested the power of the Spirit? The opportunities for exploration within this parameter seem boundless. Again, hopefully the same conclusion arises: We must recover the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the preparation and delivery of sermons.

A third parameter in this thesis-project, historical period, could be altered to produce different data using the same methodology as in this thesis-project's second chapter. For example, in what ways did preaching in the American colonial period display the presence and power of the Holy Spirit? How did the prevalent preaching during the Revolutionary War show the ministry of the Holy Spirit? What evidence exists for the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in preaching uttered since the close of World War II? Once again, through different data hopefully other researchers concur with the claim of this thesis-project: We need to recover the ministry of the Holy Spirit within contemporary preaching.

Another opportunity for further research upon this topic lies in the scope of the research. This thesis-project relied heavily on biographers and contemporary full-length monographs to build the case for the necessity and desirability of the Holy Spirit's involvement in preaching. Researchers may examine the same exemplars in the same manner as studied in this thesis-project, but they may use different supporting material

either to confirm or to correct the conclusions offered here. A scholar could examine certain archival material beyond the purview of this thesis-project—such as the collection of R. L. Dabney’s sermons held at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia.⁴ Other scholars may desire to investigate periodical literature contemporary with these exemplars. This literature may reveal, for example, that those less friendly to the exemplars here studied—and, hence, more critical of them. Should such literature avail for scholarly review, then a more holistic view of the exemplars here studied would emerge.

This thesis-project, from survey of contemporary homiletical literature, Biblical and theological bases for the Spirit’s involvement in preaching, and four exemplars from a tradition, place and time that valued the Spirit’s involvement in preaching, sustains the claim that contemporary preaching needs the Holy Spirit afresh in its preaching. The evidence not only sustains the case for the Holy Spirit in preaching, but also pleads that those who preach seek and welcome the Holy Spirit’s powerful ministry through their preaching. This is not to urge the neglect of ordinary means like diligent study and communication strategy, but these means, being alone, do not suffice for powerful preaching. Only the Holy Spirit can produce Spirit-empowered preaching: preaching powerful from God first to the preacher and afterward to those who hear.

⁴ Among the Dabney Papers held at the William Morton Library at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, are four hundred and thirty-one sermon manuscripts. See Sean Michael Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2005), 251n.15 and 251n.19.

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